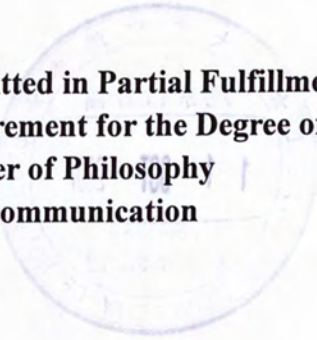


**Cross-Border Media Consumption:
Hong Kong Television Drama and Guangzhou Young Audience**

PENG Lin

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy
In Communication**



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Cross-Border Media Consumption: Hong Kong Television Drama and Guangzhou Young Audience

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Abstract

Ever since their broadcast in Guangzhou two decades ago, Hong Kong television programs, especially dramas, have soon become and remained the most-watched programs among Guangzhou residents. In the following years, they have not only changed the television viewing patterns of local audience, but also profoundly influenced the indigenous culture. The objective of this study is to investigate cross-border media consumption and its implications by examining Guangzhou young audience's viewing experiences of Hong Kong television dramas.

Young people are chosen as the target group for the study because they are generally deemed as receptive to media messages, thus have been studied mostly from the media-effects perspective. However, they in fact represent the very nature of active audience, thus it is significant to conduct a research into the processes and characteristics of their media consumption. Also, the specific viewing experiences of Guangzhou youth who grew up in the cross-border media environment gave rise to a particular collective memory and a unique generational culture.

The study primarily relies on the information gathered from in-depth interviews with the Guangzhou audience. By analyzing these data, the study performed two major tasks. From an active audience perspective, it first examined the youth's preferences

of Hong Kong dramas, the pleasures they derive from their viewing experiences and the uses they make of these programs. Secondly, these audiences' perception of Hong Kong was examined with regard to the issue of cross-border cultural identification, which has long been regarded by researchers as a result of media globalization. Based on these findings, this study tries to illustrate how the factor of cultural proximity affects these audiences' consumption of Hong Kong drama.

Theoretically, this research hopes to further understanding of regional television flow, particularly its long-term influence on audience, in the context of an increasingly globalized media environment.

論文摘要

香港電視在廣州地區已有超過二十年的收視歷史。在這段時期裏，香港節目尤其是電視劇集長期地占據著收視寶座，受到廣州居民的歡迎。多年來，這些節目不但影響著廣州觀眾的收視模式，並且深刻影響了本土文化。本研究的目的在于，通過廣州青年觀眾消費香港電視的案例，考察跨境媒介的消費過程及影響。青年在傳播學研究中一向被認為比年長的群體更易于受到媒體信息的影響，因而多成為媒介效果研究的對象。本研究之所以選擇青年觀眾作為考察對象，是因為事實上這一群體在媒介消費活動中同樣具備主動性，值得從“主動的閱聽人”的角度來重新審視。同時，這些在香港電視劇伴隨下成長的青年人，在這一跨境傳播的環境中產生了獨特的集體記憶與文化。

此研究主要通過深入訪談的方式獲取數據資料。其研究主旨有二：首先，本研究從“主動的閱聽人”角度，考察這些青年觀眾關於香港電視劇集的收視取向，收視愉悅以及媒介使用。其次，借助這一案例，本研究嘗試探討在媒體全球化的環境裏，觀眾處於境外媒體影響下的文化理解與認同問題。作為在研究中凸顯的最關鍵因素，文化接近性對於媒介消費過程的影響是本研究的核心。此次研究主要的理論意義在于，增進學界對於媒介全球化的視野下區域性跨境媒介傳播過程的瞭解，尤其是跨境媒介對於當地觀眾的長期影響。

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Chapter 1: Introduction:

This study sought to explore young audience's consumption and its cultural implications with respect to trans-border television programs in the context of modernized China. It firstly investigates Guangzhou young audience's viewing experiences of Hong Kong television dramas. They are first generation of trans-border television audience in Mainland China and also the first generation born after China adopted the "Reform and Opening-up Policy" and headed toward the direction of commercialization. Based on these findings, how the factor of cultural proximity affects their consumption of Hong Kong drama is addressed with respect to their viewing preference, pleasure and media use as well as their perception of Hong Kong.

Theoretical Context of the Problem

The major theoretical concern is with the audience factor in the research on media globalization. As an important model in audience research in the discussion on media globalization, reception studies regard television programs as visual texts that are subject to various types of reading by audiences of different social and cultural backgrounds (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980; Gripsrud, 1995;). In the discussion on media globalization, reception studies recognize the audience as a crucial factor in studying global and regional television flows. Given the activeness of the audience, studies on television reception have shown that cross-border television programs

provide a unique space for trans-border perception, as well as imagination. It is through these practices that the audience can manage their own cultural positioning. Studying the Guangzhou young audience's consumption of Hong Kong television, therefore, brings together two aspects of research interest. On one hand, the audience consumption of trans-border television flow is examined in the backdrop of socialist China, a country with a unique media context that is rarely touched upon by audience researchers. On the other hand, young television audience is rarely studied in the active audience paradigm although it is usually considered most active in absorbing foreign media content but not strong enough to resist media influence. By looking into the question of how young audience select, consume, interpret, and make use of television programs, the study seeks to broaden the scope of audience research.

With investigation into the local audience, the factor of cultural proximity in trans-border media consumption is another major focus in this study. On one hand, audience researchers advanced the factor of cultural proximity in order to contradict the idea that transnational media would take over indigenous audience market and transform audience's cultural identity. On the other, researches from various perspectives have provided evidence of the impact on indigenous society and culture of imported television programs. This study does not seek to investigate the existence of cultural impact, but rather to explore the intricate mechanism within with the factor of cultural proximity taken into account.

Trans-border media consumption is a profound process that constructs different experiences for different audience members. The audiences' experiences with media and their self-positioning practices when their identification with their local culture encounter the culture brought by trans-border media flow are what this study seeks to find. Cultural identification or cultural positioning can be studied via the audience's viewing experiences, media uses and perceptions of programs. Viewing experiences provides the space for different types of cultural perception employed by different people.

This study also tries to introduce the context of social transformation by putting these young audiences' distinct media experiences to cross-generational analysis. Due to the rapid social changes in the past decades, each birth generation has received its own social "imprinting" (Mannheim, 1952). Unlike in the Western societies, the integration of television viewing into regular household activity in urban China started in the mid-1980s. Therefore, the generations born after 1980 received the "imprinting" from their childhood and adolescence stage with the aid of the television. Moreover, members of the first "TV generation" in China spent their early ages in a time when China was carrying out the "Reform and Open-up Policy" and ceased promoting the ideology of Capitalist countries as enemies. Members of this new generation have developed their view of society and the world distinct from the previous generations, as the country underwent a commercialization and open-up process when they grew up.

This study focuses on television drama to explore Guangzhou young audience's trans-border viewing experience. Drama is the most thoroughly studied television program genre in previous audience research, which are mostly carried out in the West, for its content allows for the highest level of audience involvement and activeness, among all television genres (Allen 1995; Gripsrud, 1990). On the other hand, during trans-border television audience research, comparison between dramas from different sources of origin is applicable in most cases due to their fictional nature and similar structures.

The Case of Guangzhou

During the late 1980s, more and more Guangzhou residents began to have access to Hong Kong television through the spillover of broadcast signals from Hong Kong. Later on, the official cable TV was constructed with several Hong Kong television channels. The viewing patterns of local audience have been considerably changed since then, and Hong Kong television channels soon became the most-watched channels (Chan, 2000). In the following 15 years, Hong Kong television programs (from TVB, ATV) accompanied the life of most Guangzhou people (nine years for Phoenix TV). Therefore, it can be considered that the whole generation that grew up during this period has been in an entirely different media environment compared to their earlier generations, as well as their counterparts who grew up in other provinces. Recognizing the above three theoretical concerns of this study, the case of

Guangzhou young audience is chosen for two reasons. For one thing, Guangzhou is among the earliest cities that have adopted the Reform and Open-up policy, and it soon grew into a commercial city. Its economic take-off has profound impact on the society in various aspects. It was in this context that Guangzhou became one of the first cities in which trans-border media (Hong Kong media) were given tacit approval by the local government. Today, television audience in Guangzhou has the longest history of consuming trans-border television programs in contemporary China.

For another, it is also one of the cities that have introduced trans-border television dramas from the largest variety of sources. Due to lack of resources, local television channels have been importing foreign drama series since the early 1980s to fill their airtime. Also, largely due to the Hong Kong televisions' interest to air dramas from different countries around the world, Guangzhou audience have begun to consume dramas from Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and the US in early 1990s. Only in a city like this can trans-border television consumption be analyzed at all local, regional and global scales. Moreover, in this case, the "regional" scale may be further broken down to two sub-scales: linguistic regional scale (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore) and non-linguistic regional scale (Japan and Korea).

These conditions make Guangzhou young audiences' consumption of Hong Kong television programs a good case for examining different theoretical themes in trans-border television flow. This type of study has mainly been conducted in Western

countries before. China, as a rising country with a rapid development in receiving trans-border media programming, is also a unique case in East Asia that deserves our attention.

It is important to point out that this study is based on “trans-border” rather than “transnational” media consumption. The term “trans-border” is used because Hong Kong is never a foreign country to China although it used to be a British colony. Moreover, it has been absorbed into national boundary since the 1997 Handover. Moreover, although Hong Kong and Mainland societies differ in many ways, they are still under two distinct regimes and on different stages of development. Hong Kong is one of the most developed regions in Asia, while Guangzhou is still under development. In 1997, Hong Kong’s per capita GDP was USD 27,000 USD while Guangzhou’s was USD 2,855. The “border” here refers also to all these virtual gaps.

Composition of “TV Generation” in Guangzhou

The youth in Guangzhou are a diverse population. They can be divided into two major groups.

1. Native Guangzhou youth:

This refers to those whose families have inhabited Guangzhou for more than three generations. Guangzhou is the closest city in Mainland China to Hong Kong in terms of language. Cantonese is the mother tongue of native Guangzhou youth. Besides, Hong Kong people have a lot in common with Guangzhou people, in that they have

similar Cantonese dietetic habits, conventions, and traditions. Many native Guangzhou youth have relatives in Hong Kong, which make them more familiar with Hong Kong people and culture.

2. Non-native Guangzhou youth (children of early immigrants, those who were born in or moved with their parents to Guangzhou before teenage):

Guangzhou as one of the earliest open cities in South China has been accepting immigrants since the early 1980s. However, the amount of early immigrants (before 1990) is comparatively small. Most early immigrants to Guangzhou are businessmen or families of military men, as Guangzhou is one of the six major military areas in China.

Although most of the non-native Guangzhou youth are fluent in Cantonese, generally speaking, they use mandarin as their daily language. In terms of dietetic habits, conventions and traditions, non-native youth are highly different from the native Guangzhou and Hong Kong people, due to their parents. Within China, cultural spheres differ profoundly in various aspects. Most immigrant families, especially those who came from the northern part of China, managed to maintain their old lifestyles. This group of youth has comparatively larger cultural distance with Guangzhou and the Cantonese culture. At the same time, most of these non-native young people also do not know how to speak the dialects of their parents, and are unfamiliar with their cultures.

Besides being native or not, other factors like class, gender, education level, having been to Hong Kong or not, and having a relative in Hong Kong or not can also affect their TV consumption experience and cultural identification. In this study, different types of background information are all recorded for follow-up analysis.

According to the media context in Guangzhou, members of the first “trans-border TV generation” were born in the 1980s. In the third part of this study, viewing activities and media uses in the group of respondents of 20-25 years old are compared to those in an even younger group with ages around 15 as well as an older group with ages around 35 to 45.

Cultural Proximity Between Guangzhou and Hong Kong

Hong Kong is located only 150 kilometers away from Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province. Before it turned into a British colony, the city used to be a little fishing town at the south of Guangdong. Following the first Opium War, the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 ceded Hong Kong to Britain. During those conflicts, China, under the Qing Dynasty, lost control over Kowloon and Stonecutters Island in 1860. In 1898, Britain acquired New Territories on a 99-year lease.

Although Hong Kong was set on the way of westernization and separated from the rest of Guangdong province for over a hundred years, the Cantonese culture is still prevalent among Hong Kong people. Not only that Hong Kong and Guangzhou people are speaking the same dialect, but they also share many cultural traditions.

People in both cities have the same dietetic habits, interest in Cantonese Opera, practice of worshipping the Buddha, and so on.

More importantly, lots of Hong Kong people are related to Guangzhou people (and also to people from other parts of Guangdong province) by kinship. Despite Hong Kong's long-term separation from Mainland China, large amount of people migrated from Mainland to Hong Kong in the past two centuries. For instance, from 1945-1947, Hong Kong's total population rose from about 600,000 to 1,750,000¹, primarily due to large-scale migration. From 1971—1994, Hong Kong admitted about 800,000 legal immigrants, most of whom were from Guangdong. In this research, only two native youth respondents did not have relatives in Hong Kong. This kinship relation between Hong Kong and Guangzhou people undoubtedly facilitates communication between the two cities, bringing them closer in terms of life and culture.

The factor of cultural proximity in audience research was suggested by Straubhaar (1991) based on the case of Brazil. Straubhaar argues that audiences tend to choose to view regional or national television programs despite the attractiveness of media products from “core” countries such as U.S., out of a search for cultural proximity. This contradicts media imperialism's assumption that transnational media products have significant impact on indigenous cultures through their domination in local market and popularity among audiences.

¹Hong Kong Census and Statistics Dept. (1969). *Hong Kong statistics, 1947-1967*. Hong Kong : S.n.

However, simply the fact that national or regional media products may gain strong support from audiences is insufficient for denying transnational media products' cultural influence. In fact, there are also studies that have shown audiences hold different attitudes towards local and transnational programs (Biltereyst, 1991) and the latter, if superior in terms of format or content, can have considerable influence on the audiences' views on certain program types and genres (Lee, 2004). In this sense, how the factor of cultural proximity affects audiences' reading of media products and, eventually, their cultural identification, is still left unanswered.

The case of Guangzhou young audiences' consumption of Hong Kong dramas provides an excellent opportunity for examining not only how the factor of cultural proximity functions in audiences' consumption of trans-border media products, but also how it affects their perception of the visualized Hong Kong modernity.

Organization of Chapters

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 sketches the formulation of this research and highlights the specificity of the case of Guangzhou young audience. Chapter 2 briefly reviews some theoretical arguments and empirical studies concerning the social impact of trans-border television in the age of globalization, audience consumption of trans-border television, the interaction between media and youth culture, and media's impact on collective memory. By connecting these separate research fields, the third chapter maps out the theoretical configurations for

this study. Chapter 3 delineates the research questions and the research design of the study. Research findings and discussions are presented in the following three chapters. Each chapter is designated to investigate one of the two research questions. Chapter 4 provides detailed description and discussion of how the factor of cultural proximity affect these young audiences' media consumption by comparing the natives' viewing preferences, pleasures, and media uses with the non-natives. Chapter 5 goes on to discuss this factor's impact on the young audiences' perception of Hong Kong and its culture after their long-term consumption of Hong Kong dramas. Chapter 6 puts the previous findings into a cross-generational context with the results from two other age groups regarding the same issues. It investigates the interaction between their life experience and their consumption of Hong Kong drama. In Chapter 7, the conclusion is reached not only on the basis of the Guangzhou audience case but also on the profound social and cultural background of China. Also, the implications and limitations are discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of theories and empirical studies concerning trans-border media consumption among young audience. The analytical framework of this research is formulated from the attempt to integrate four theoretical perspectives during the research on television audience: the social impact of trans-border television in the age of globalization, audience consumption of trans-border television, the interaction between media and youth culture, and generational culture under the influence of mass media. Strands of literatures from different starting points are to be weaved together to come up with the background necessary to understand and evaluate the specific case of Guangzhou young audience.

Trans-border Television and Its Social Impact

The discussion on media globalization has one core focus. That is, what are the consequences of media globalization? The most famous model, namely, media imperialism model, claimed that cultural homogenization is an inevitable consequence, which in fact is a process that is based on global capitalism—the rich countries homogenize other countries culturally through transnational media (Schiller, 1976). One major argument in this theory is that audience in those “periphery” countries will identify with the culture of those “core” countries through consuming global media products. However, scholars for media imperialism took this pessimistic view for granted that they usually neglect empirical studies at the

audience end, which has been severely criticized throughout the years.

Based on Hall's Encoding/ Decoding model (Hall 1974), reception theory regards audience as active and can have their own way of reading. It gives audience the autonomy to negotiate with or oppose to the information offered by texts, which are themselves also polysemic. Fiske (1989), in his studies on television and popular culture, argues that audience or the previous "mass," can express their resistance to media programming and the dominant culture in multiple ways. Because of insisting "negotiation" and "resistance", reception theory argues against media imperialism that audience will not necessarily identify with the dominant culture, hence cultural homogenization is not inevitable (Crane 2002).

1. Media's Modernizing Influence

However, this does not imply that media's impact on audience and culture can be ignored in audience research. Firstly, due to the western modern experience that media have brought to many underdeveloped regions, their social impact appeared in the form of a modernizing influence. Almost half a century ago, Lerner (1958) discussed about the modernizing influence of mass media in the development of the Middle East. He argues that mass media have multiplied psychic mobility and provided their audience the vicarious experience of the modernized West. Therefore, they are an important factor in the transition from traditional society to modern society. From an intensive research on Brazilian television audience, Kottack (1990)

discovers that TELEVISION had affected social behavior in rural Brazil in various aspects such as stimulating a thirst for knowledge, and increasing skills in social navigation as well as communication with outsiders. He concludes that higher media exposure leads to a decrease in cultural distance between rural Brazil and the outside world. Television impact should be interpreted as a progress with stages. Meanwhile, he also emphasizes that researchers have to take into account the context of prior culture(s) and subculture of the audience.

Johnson (2001) also observed the impacts of TELEVISION on culture and society during his study in rural India. He focuses on the role of media in the process of social development and found out that village society mirrors the cosmopolitan life through TV viewing. Many television programs have encouraged urban lifestyles and legitimized it as accepted norms in rural India (Johnson, 2001:152). In addition to reinforcing urban modeling, television programs function to restructure human relationships, introduce new languages that carry new ideas with them, contribute to rural-urban migration, and give rise to an information underclass. Based on these findings, Johnson posited that television has a modernizing influence on culture and the society.

2. Media's Impact on Cultural Identities

Other than the modernizing influence, mass media, television in particular, has long been associated with the discussion on cultural identities in contemporary society.

This is largely due to the idea that electronic media are transforming human experience of time and space. As interpreted by Giddens (1990), media is one of the driving forces in globalization. He identifies “time-space distantiation” as a trait of globalization and argues the sense of familiar is often mediated by time-space distantiation. Therefore, the globalized “communities” of shared experience, owing to transnational media, have a deep impact on people’s identification. Hall (1992) also asserts that changes in time-space relationship within different systems of representation have profound effects on how identities are located and represented. All identities are located in symbolic space and time. He points out three possible consequences of globalization on cultural identities, such as erosion, strengthening, and the emergence of new identities. According to Hall, there is a breakdown of all established cultural identities, which he calls “global-postmodern.” This means that “the more social life becomes mediated by the global marketing of styles, images and places by globally networked media, the more identities become detached or disembodied from specific time, place, histories and traditions, and appear to be free-floating”. In other words, those changes in identity are due to the emergence of global media.

As people’s identities are considered to be closely associated with geography and culture, media’s impact on their sense of geography and culture might result in profound changes in identities. Based on his research on the impact of electronic media on social behavior, Meyrowitz (1986) posited that electronic media, especially

TV, are destroying our sense of locality. The link between culture and geography is disrupted and people can escape from identities forged by relationship between them and the geographical locality. Although he has been criticized for this highly deterministic argument, the question he raises about how the sense of place (local, national, diasporic, global) is affected by the media is significant for future study in cultural identities.

Moreover, media's impact on identities can be observed from media consumption activities. Baudrillard (1988) argues that in this postmodern age, activities of consumption, especially of mass media, now play an even larger role in defining people's identities and consciousness than social class. Contemporary audience research has shifted its focus from regarding audience as all passive mass to considering more about the dynamics of identification and orientation in media consumption. According to Hebdige (1989), consumer culture encourages people to articulate what they would like to become, thus creating new "communities of consumers".

The modernizing influence of trans-border media is not separated but intertwined with their impact on audience identity. This issue in contemporary global media flow has aroused attention from many researchers. Particularly, changes in identity with regard to the issue of modernization are more prominent in studies on Asian transnational media. In this vast continent where the richest and the poorest countries of the world coexist, "modernization" has been a key word throughout the past two

centuries.

3. Media Impact in Asian Cases

In East Asia, media culture can still be characterized by “core- periphery” dichotomy. The media center in Asia that has been studied the most is Japan, a major source of animated cartoon, movie, as well as television drama series for Asian audience. Ko (2004) studied the reception of Japanese idol dramas in Taiwan and tried to dig into the fact why the Taiwanese who loved the dramas so much, also criticized them drastically. He also studied the youth cultural identity and their identification with Japan. After interviews and discourse analysis, he concluded that Japanese television dramas’ popularity could be attributed to the fact that they invoked an imagination of an idealized and modernized future for the young audience in Taiwan. Surprisingly, he found out that the young audience simply regarded the dramas as highly realistic, although they had not seen the real Japan. He argued that the forms and narratives of Japanese idol dramas provided a possible modernized future for the local imagination. The fever and fear were both based on Taiwan’s colonized past and the colonized modernity that Japan brought to Taiwan, where cultural affinity also played a considerably important role.

Similar accounts can also be found in a study done in Thailand. In a study by Siriyuvasak (2004), he focused on the increasing influence of Japanese popular culture on Thai youth. He positioned the formation of a “modernized” identity in the

1980s up to the 1990s when the economy was booming. The middle-class youth firstly became its customers, and then modern citizens of globalization who would identify with those who are more modernized. Different from the Taiwan case, the author criticized globalization as being repressive. He claimed that the new generation lacked the ability to control their discourse and were thus controlled by the symbolic power outside.

Changes in cultural identification are a process that can also be quantified and measured. In a comparative analysis on the cultural values conveyed by American, Japanese and Taiwanese TV as perceived by the Hong Kong audience, Lee (2004) found that those values can be classified into four kinds, namely, “Western values”, “Asian values”, “national values” and “universal values”. These values can be further compared with the “local values” perceived by local people to see whether trans-border media have a subtle influence on the local culture through penetrating the value system.

Studies concerning the same topic have already been conducted in Guangzhou in the past. Chan (2000), based on a survey and interviews carried out in 1993, he studied the cross-border television effects on Guangzhou residents. Television effects were examined on two aspects, namely, institutional influence and reception influence, as reflected in audience viewing behavior, media evaluations, tastes, attitudes, values, and social perceptions. Through comparison between people with full access to Hong Kong television and those without, the researcher concluded that Hong Kong

programs represents a more advanced way of life and has the edge in setting the trends and preference for the Chinese urban population and Guangdong residents, in particular.

This situation has been changed a lot since the handover of Hong Kong to China and the decline of Hong Kong's economy. Another quantitative study carried out in 1997-1998 (Chen, Guo & Zhu, 2002) still partly supported the above conclusion that Hong Kong television had profound impact on audience's cognitive and behavioral aspects. At the same time, it did not seem to significantly affect audiences' value systems since they were highly active in consuming its programs.

Qualitative studies are sometimes more capable of dealing with the activeness of audience and providing a full understanding of what is going on underneath, as they mostly focus on the unique experience of individual audience. Under the topic of "televisual imagination", how different audiences perceive and interpret the visualized Hong Kong modernity was studied (Fung & Ma, 2002). The researchers argue that trans-border televisual imagination is a combination of immediate experience in the Guangzhou socioscape and imagined experiences in the mediascape as represented in Hong Kong dramas. Different imaginations are categorized into four modes, each representing a different degree of creative mixing of the socioscape and the mediascape within individual imaginary world. Employing these modes, audience members actively negotiated with media messages rather than being manipulated by them. Another study on Guangzhou audiences' reading of

Hong Kong television (Fung, 1999) showed that most respondents were rather critical in watching its programs, fully able to resist media messages that might threaten their local culture.

Audience in Trans-border TV Consumption

Empirical studies into audience experiences of consuming transnational television have been carried out in different societies all over the world. The emphasis has been placed on different modes of decoding among audience, most of which are “oppositional” or “negotiated” rather than “preferred” decoding (Hall, 1974). Moreover, these studies explore the reasons behind decoding modes. Possible explanations include nationality, ethnicity, class, cultural and media tradition, political perspective, etc.

1. Modes of Decoding & Audience Resistance

The fundamental framework for studies on audience’s decoding is established from the experiences accumulated in many classic research practices. Ang (1985) studied the Dutch women audience of the American soap, *Dallas*, by asking viewers to write to her regarding their feelings about the show. Having analyzed the letters written by the viewers, she considered watching *Dallas* as an experience mediated by the “ideology of mass culture” that led viewers to adopt complicated ways in decoding it, in that they liked it yet saw it as “trash”, or viewed it as acceptable to watch if they

are aware of the dangers it may involve.

Later on, *Dallas* became a symbol for American television globalization. Liebes and Katz (1991) conducted a study into the national and ethnic cultural differences in the reception of *Dallas* of viewers from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. They paid particular attention to cross-cultural dimensions in the study. Based on the findings, Americans were less critical of ideological content and more critical of production context. Russians were more critical of the “politics” in the show while Arab groups have a high sensitivity to the “dangers” of western culture and the “moral degeneracy”. This research suggests the way in which audiences use their own sense of national and ethnic identity as positions to decode the program.

Gripsrud (1995) used combined theories and methods to study the reception of a Hollywood television program *Dynasty* in Norway. He made comparison between the reception of *Dynasty* in Norway and in the US. According to it, the class factor plays a major role in how respondents make sense of the texts in both countries. However, for the same class, there are differences between the two audiences. He concluded that the difference between the two audiences is neither in the television system nor in the television history, but rather in media cultural traditions. Norwegians took television seriously, in that they used it for informative programming. And aesthetically, they regarded American cultural products as characterized by a “larger-than-life” aesthetic, and were charmed by this quality. They did not expect a true-to-life presentation from any American program, which

means the Hollywood is not expected to serve social realism in European context. In addition to ethnic and cultural factors, Morley (1980), based on Hall's encoding/decoding model, studied the audience of the 1970s program, *Nationwide*, and arrived at the conclusion that class is the critical factor for structuring audiences' decoding process. He discovered that groups with different political perspectives have different positions in decoding.

2. Cultural Proximity and Reception of Local/Transnational Programs

With the focus on how audiences decode transnational programs, all of these studies, to different extents, incline to the idea that the audience exerts significant resistance to transnational programs. Believing in the activeness in the audience, these researchers see audience's cultural identities as static and invariable. They consciously or unconsciously reject the idea that audiences can be influenced by these media products during the course of reception.

Furthermore, built on active audience, the argument of audience preference and cultural proximity evolve in audience research of global media. Straubhaar (1991) argues that, audiences make active choices to view international or regional or national television programs. Their choices favor the latter two when they have time, based on a search for cultural relevance or proximity. Pool (1977) in the late 1970s had predicted that audience preference would lead television industries and advertisers to produce more national programs, and select programs within the same

region, cultural group, and language group. This prediction has been supported by studies done within both the quantitative Uses and Gratification paradigm and qualitative reception analysis. Straubhaar emphasizes in the article that language groups tend to reinforce regionality, and accordingly, with other things being equal, the audience will choose their own cultural products when they can.

In another article, Straubhaar (1996) criticizes media imperialism, dependency theory, and transnationalism as overtly simplistic. He argues that media globalization means the worldwide homogenization of television, the erosion of national and cultural differences, and domination of all by the dominant culture. Furthermore, he developed the concept of cultural proximity by differentiating multi-levels of media. He proposed that there is a level that is truly global, there is another that is regional or geo-linguistic, one that is national, and there is also a sub-national or “regional” (within the nation) level. Cultural proximity, which unifies the geo-cultural television market, is based on shared language, history, religion, ethnicity, or specific cultural elements such as shared gestures, clothing styles, climate influence or even what is considered funny and sacred. He cited the Western Europe, Latin America and the Chinese market as instances in this category. Recently there are a number of empirical studies supporting Straubhaar’s view. A review of the transnational media consumption in Asian countries (Chadha & Kavoori 2000) presents three counter-forces against global media homogenization: the national gate-keeping policy, dynamics of audience preference, and local competition. The latter two constitute the

cultural proximity factor. The authors criticize cultural imperialism as it tends to romanticize and fetishize the “national culture” as essentially necessary, progressive, and desirable. They remind future researchers to study not only the pattern of media reception, but also the different discourses rooted in language, class, gender, ethnicity and social experience, which crucially mediate the process of viewing, as suggested by Morley (1980).

Besides the studies done at the transnational level, the question of regional (within the nation) media mentioned by Straubhaar is also worth noticing. A study in Egypt (Abu-Lughod, 1993) looks into the internal dynamics of the nation-state that participate in the media flows. The study suggests that some cities may tend to dominate other regions culturally, economically or even politically. Abu-Lughod goes further to discuss the issue that groups in outlying regions can have their distinct identities due to the fact that they are not well integrated into the national center.

How cultural proximity functions in media consumption activities can only be analyzed through the comparison of local and transnational TV consumption. Regarding this, studies have also shown that audiences might not always be active in consuming media products of different origins. In a small-scale study on the audiences’ strategies in decoding commercial US and domestic (Belgium) sitcoms, Biltreyst (1991) discovered that audience reception of US sitcom is far less active than that of domestic ones. Their expectations in viewing US sitcom are promising

and folkloric. While in viewing domestic sitcoms, their expectations are critical and sarcastic. Due to the high recognition of domestic sitcoms, audiences' interpretations tend to be more personal, complex, and specific. On the contrary, their interpretations of US sitcoms are linear and fixed, which shows a lower degree of activeness. This study suggests researchers to look into the extent to which audiences are actively receiving programs produced by different media.

The above studies have explored the cultural proximity factor in different aspects. Although researches regarding this concept were mostly concentrated on audiences' viewing patterns, the evidences showing audiences actively seeking for cultural proximity in TV programs have challenged the former idea that the imbalance of media flows and cultural influence was irresistible. Moreover, they suggest that the impact of trans-border media from a higher modernity on local cultural identities might be rather limited (Chen 2004). Chen analyzed studies done in the Asian context and concluded that nowadays, most scholars in audience research accept the stability of cultural identification, which is based on stable factors such as religion, ethnicity, and tradition. Many empirical studies support that local TV programs, if well produced, are more attractive than imported ones. Given the fact that visual texts are polysemic, audience can decode them in a localized and personalized way. Meanwhile, nation-state is still decisive at least in Asia; the cultural boundaries are far from vanishing. In the discourse of ethnic identity, administrative state continues to be the basic parameter. Moreover, nation-state also plays an important role in

media globalization.

Most of the above studies have illustrated different modes of decoding and audiences' preferences of TV programs based on their national or cultural identities. Some researchers consider viewing preferences to be associated with cultural identities. While for others, this link might not be necessary. Lately, another perspective in studying transnational viewing and cultural identification has been suggested by scholars. Robins and Aksoy (2005) conducted a three-year-long study in London on media use of the Turkish speaking communities. Instead of focusing on "identity", they propose to use "experience" as the core conceptual category in research. According to them, experience starts from what people "live through", from the multiplicity of their implications and engagements and interactions with the social world (Robins & Aksoy, 2005: 23). In this way, their study is concerned with how media audiences talk about their experience of the media and think about their strategies of cultural positioning. With the question of how these people are negotiating positions between national and transnational spaces, the scholars discovered that these migrants are changing their relation to media knowledge and no longer take the national community as their natural frame of reference. The negotiation of contradictory cultural experiences by these audiences shows that the idea of a unitary, national sphere can no longer be taken as given, and the category of "experience" might be much more productive than "identity" in audience research on transnational viewing.

Young Audience in Trans-Border TV Consumption

Generally speaking, young people are considered as highly receptive to media content, making them the best objects in most classic media effect studies. Unlike media effect studies, researches that deal with reception paradigm had not paid much attention to the youth until recently, when most transnational television programs have taken young people as their target audience. These studies serve as a guide in structuring the research on Guangzhou young audience.

Although cultural identity has always been one of the major concerns in audience research in many early studies, it is regarded as relatively stable with people. Recently, however, more and more scholars started to view it as a continuously flowing and negotiating process (Frith, 1996). In research on young audience, the instability of cultural identity is even more visible. Roussou (2002) conducted a research between 1997 and 2000 in Cyprus to examine the relationship between Cypriot television programs and the cultural identity of Greek-Cypriot teenager. The study focused on two aspects of cultural identity— ethnicity and lifestyle values. As we have seen in the previous studies, the concept of cultural identity is always regarded as more or less identical to ethnicity, and the lifestyle values of individuals are somewhat neglected. However, as Roussou pointed out, ethnicity is connected to the past, to cultural heritage, to tradition and common values, while lifestyles transform with time. It is important to make clear that the unstable, dynamic process

of cultural identity of the audience in fact refers to the latter.

The author quoted Miegel's (1998) argument on lifestyle and media effect but emphasized that it is important to remember that cultural identity is formed and developed through a process of lifestyle development. In acquiring and maintaining cultural identity, individuals use their values, attitudes and actions to develop personal identity, and more importantly, to relate or disconnect themselves from the social network. In this way, it is possible that audience's cultural identification transform with the change of their lifestyles. Nowadays, the young generations in many countries consume media products containing messages from more modernized cultures. This poses new questions to scholars engaged in audience research, whether these transnational media products affect audiences' cultural identification and how.

1. Identification and TV Viewing

Modernity factor seems to be a crucial issue in the changes in young audiences' identification. In studying the Taiwan youth's identification of Japanese TV dramas, Lee Ming-tsung (2004) conducted interviews with Taiwan youth who had also traveled to Japan. From this, he was able to identify three major types of identification in Taiwanese youth. Some consider that the Taiwanese culture had always been hybrid and a peculiar compound of native and foreign influences. They do not tend to devalue their Taiwanese cultural identity in favor of a Japanese one.

Others were attracted to Japanese dramas because they thought of Japan as a mirror and a modernized model for the Taiwanese. In some extreme cases, people can be categorized as having quasi-national identification with Japan based on TV viewing. Researches in Asia have provided many cases in this category. From a survey in Singapore about the impact of Japanese popular culture, Hao and Teh (2004) discovered that the prevalence of Japanese media and cultural products has generated the young people's favorable perception of them compared to domestic ones. Japanese media, idol dramas in particular, that exert a modeling effect on youngsters, have much stronger impact on audiences' perception and cultural identification than other cultural products. The researchers suggest that this may result in an inferiority complex among the Singaporean youth, as they tend to believe the "Japan" in dramas without being aware that these products do not exactly portray social realities.

2. Cultural Proximity and Television Viewing

Cultural proximity as discussed in previous paragraphs is considered as influential in audiences' consumption activities. However, among young audience, this does not always seem to be the case. Leung (2004) used a combination of textual and audience analysis in investigating the reception of Japanese drama in Hong Kong. He identified "Ganbaru" as the major theme in Japanese drama, and used focus group interview to make comparison among people of different ages. He discovered hyper-reading or the richness of interpretation, in their reception, and examined the

extent to which the audiences interpret fantastical elements in those texts as ideological messages. Grounded on their decoding and interpretation, he went further to study their viewing pleasures and media uses. He found that younger groups tended to seek romance in the dramas while older groups considered them as encouragement to strive for better life. Audience would actively work lines and expressions from the drama into daily life. As for the cultural proximity issue, Leung pointed out that the “part-fantasy, part-reality” formula which constitutes the “similar but not quite the same” feature of Japanese drama, contributed considerably to its success.

Leung suggests in the article that viewing pleasures may stem from the search for romance, linguistic capital and modern lifestyle, which are inspiring for future trans-border audience studies. The possibility of hyper-reading is another issue that cannot be neglected in all audience researches. Moreover, this author also pointed out that cultural proximity may sometimes be a disadvantage. By this token, regional media products may win the market by their “similar, but not quite the same” feature.

On the other hand, the youth’s preferences, unlike that of the former generations’, are more likely to be shaped by global media products. Lee Dong-Hoo (2004) did a comparative analysis of Korean trendy dramas and Japanese dramas, particularly in terms of the narrative form and subject matter of *Jealousy* (Korean drama) and *Tokyo Love Story* (Japanese Drama), and found that they are very similar. Lee Dong-Hoo concluded that local producers have to find relevant reference from Japanese dramas

in order to meet local youth's taste, largely due to the fact that the genre formula has already been set up by Japanese dramas. Television genre is in fact a cultural construct. Korean local producers have to provide imagery similar to Japanese dramas to survive in the market.

This article also serves to warn us against taking for granted the resistance generated from cultural proximity in similar cases. The complexities in cultural proximity prompt researchers to examine the concept against another phenomenon in the local scenario, which can be described as part of globalization. The emphasis here is placed on the fact that local players have to conform to the conventions set up by global players for the sake of financial success. This illustrates the questionableness of the claim that audience naturally prefers local programs, particularly the young audience.

The possible reason for the ineffectiveness of cultural proximity factor against trans-border media among youth may be illustrated by some Diaspora cases. A study on Korean American youth's consumption of Korean and Japanese TV dramas provides us an example of this kind. Park (2004) performed a study on the viewing patterns including "preference" and "pleasure" as two major parts. He found that appealing story line, structure of feeling, cultural reference and fashion trends all contribute to their interest in Japanese dramas. The researcher classified the Korean American youth into three categories: the US born, the 1.5 generation (those who emigrated to the US in their pre-teens or early teens with their parents), and students studying

abroad. Through analyzing their accounts of Korean and Japanese Drama, Park discusses two contradictory aspects—cultural proximity and cultural distance at length.

Park discovered in his study a phenomenon that he called “internalization of Japanese cultural information”, by which he meant that Korean American youth might not be able to recognize the origin of cultural influence and take Japanese cultural element as their own. Scholars have pointed this out before in discussions on globalization and McDonaldization that culture is being transformed through global players’ altering of the local conventions and manners. This case shows that possible internalization of non-local cultural information is also closely related to cultural identification in that unconscious acceptance of non-local cultural elements consequently lowers audiences’ resistance to them and brings cultural proximity, a tendency which is more visible in the long run.

Trans-border Media Consumption in Cross-generational Context

Prior to the discussion of Guangzhou youth, the concept of generation needs to be explored. Mannheim (1952) shed light on the modern sociological research on generations by his essay, “On the problem of generations”. In the essay, he refers to a generation as a group of individuals with a common location in the social and historical process. Belonging to the same generation thus limits them to a specific range of experiences, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought

and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action (1952:291). In a sense, Mannheim implies that a generation is not a biological necessity but a social creation, in that the emergence of generations depends entirely on the “triggering action” of the social and cultural process.

However, application of the generation concept in sociological research is limited by its various undefined implications. As concepts with clearer meaning are needed for empirical investigations, Ryder suggests the “cohort” concept, which simply refers to “the aggregate of individuals who experienced the same event within the same time interval”(Ryder, 1965: 845). With regard to the relationship between these two concepts, Eyerman and Turner argues that for a cohort to become a generation requires “something like a significant event... which sorted a population not so much according to which side one was on, but more in terms of who experienced it first hand and who did not” (Eyerman & Turner, 1998:100). They suggest that special attention should be drawn to the idea of a shared or collective cultural field (of emotions, attitudes, preferences and dispositions) and a set of embodied practices (of sport and leisure activities) in the discussion of generations.

Collective memories comprise the recollections of the past that are determined and shaped by the group (Zelizer, 1995). Studies have been carried out on collective memory with regard to the formation of generation since the advance of Mannheim’s theory. Schuman and Scott (1989) explored the “imprinting” that generations receive from political events with a probability sample of 1,410 Americans. Based on these

results, they point out that differences in generational perspectives on certain events are the result of varying locations in historical time.

Despite the pioneer role Schuman and Scott played in research on generational collective memory, they have been criticized for ignoring regional differences in their analysis of generations. In the study, Schuman and Scott were unable to find the predicted age patterns for whites' recollections of Civil Rights movement. Griffin (2004) attributes this failure to the fact that they did not notice that "civil rights memory" should be greater for southern whites than for their age-peers elsewhere since the South was the battlefield for civil rights. Through his analysis of Schuman and Scott's data, Griffin posits that we should consider Mannheim's idea of the "social location" of generational identity formation to be place-specific as well as age-dependent. Moreover, a lot of social factors, such as region, race, gender, and age, all matter in the construction of collective memories. He emphasizes that the question of how memory actually shapes or does not shape consciousness and action is the one that should be delved into in future research.

1. Mass Media and Collective Memory

Although memory and generational "imprinting" are generated from social history, memory studies have shown that researchers need to draw distinction between memory and history, as collective memory is both more mobile and mutable than history (Zelizer 1995). As a result, contemporary research on collective memory

should take into account the part played by commercialized mass media. Different agents of mediation have helped organize information, at a point somewhat distant from the event. Scholars have pointed out that mass media, which serve to supply social events, offer sites for the creation of social memory (Zelner 1995; Nerone & Wartella, 1989). Moreover, Lipsitz (1990) asserts that commercialized media now play the role of producers of collective memory.

In his conceptual article on cultural functions of television rerun programming, Weispfenning (2003) argues that reruns function as collective memory in that they repeat the shared experience of generations. Since generations are defined as socially constructed age groups with shared experiences, rerun programs may have the potential to define and identify generations and societies. "They have the potential to replace the personal memories of the death of a pet animal with the memory of *The Cosby Show* episode in which Cliff Huxtable conducted a funeral for Rudy's goldfish." (Weispfenning 2003: 173) He concludes that generational collective memories may be mass marketed by the culture industries, distributed, and redistributed for our enjoyment.

As shared experiences and collective memories are largely mediated, contemporary youth's generational culture can hardly emerge independently from the influence of mass media. Scholars have pointed out that youth are living in a separate generational enclave created by electronic media (Schultze et al 1990). Electronic media isolate youth from the more traditional worlds of previous generations,

including those of their own parents. In 1950s, the new linkages created by media and transportation already succeeded in driving a whole generation of teenagers to develop nationwide common taste in fashion, language, habits and more. Mass media have continuously reformulated the youth culture according to latest trends from 1950s to the present. They conclude that these media isolate teenagers from the adult world, and at the same time, promote intra-generational communication among youth worldwide.

The term “television generation” evolved from studies on the effects on the youth of growing up with television. In this sense, television generation is loosely defined as the group of those birth cohorts who has grown up (completely or at least in part) with television (Peiser 1999: 365). Cohort analysis, a method to analyze aspects of behavior with respect to age, period, and cohort, is commonly used in these effect studies (Mcleod and O’Keefe 1972; Bower 1973; Glenn 1994). Achievements in previous studies have shed light on not only the conceptual framework of studying generations with regard to media use, but also the specific aspects in operationalizing the generation concept in research. For instance, Peiser (1999) suggests that the definition of generation should be country-specific, recognizing the differences between countries in diffusion of television and other social factors. In spite of this, cohort analyses of media use mainly focus on the question of how a stronger television viewing habit and affection for television influence people’s reading

behavior, without really penetrating into the issues of generational experiences or identities.

2. Cultural Practices and Generation

Discussion on exclusive generational experiences requires us to delve into the relationship between cultural practices and generation. Based on Mannheim's idea of generation as an actuality, Corsten(1999) accents that scholars should take generational discursive practices into account while analyzing the historical demarcation of generations. According to Corstern, the answer to the question of how generations as collectives identify and locate themselves in the historical process lies in the practice of "self-thematization," by which generations identify their own patterns of interpretation and validation of collective experience in discourses. In this way, people belonging to a generation develop their own way of understanding themselves and their worlds in comparison with others.

Although the study of generation contributes significantly to a better understanding of the transformation of a society or a culture, the formation of generation with regard to television influence is a topic that has been discussed rarely in empirical studies. Recently, studies on the younger generation have been carried out in Japan with the research question of whether the younger generation is creating a new society. Miller (2004) observes that Japanese youth have developed their distinct fashion which represents an undermining of the ethnic homogeneity that their

parents endorsed and reified as a Japanese quality. With their beautification practices, Japanese youth exert an “exquisite, flamboyant control over their lives and their own bodies” (White & Mathews 2004: 190). The new generation advocates the idea that the body is a malleable surface that may be cut, molded, or transformed in new ways. They attempt to make themselves in opposition to the older generation and use fashion as a means of creating and displaying new identities.

On the other hand, differences between generations are also significant indicators of social change. White (2004) discovers that the Japanese youth in a small town has developed a cosmopolitan identity that defines them against the old. These young people have adapted to a new cosmopolitanism and constructed their diverse and plural community in contrast with the geographically specific groups to which the older generations belong. In addition, the young generation has developed new consciousness of positioning themselves in the world which can respond to and include diverse others. White concludes that it is the emergence of the community of consumption and popular culture that provides a framework through which this new “global citizenship” can be made and maintained.

Summary

This chapter reviewed a range of theories and research findings that are relevant to the research questions in this study. Firstly, research on trans-border television shows that television consumption has marked impact on culture and society. From the

Media Imperialism discourse to Reception Studies, modernizing influence has been addressed as the most salient impact of trans-border television. Generally, imported television programs exert the modeling effect and provide the opportunity for audience, especially in developing countries, to learn and apprehend a higher modernity. Meanwhile, electronic media in contemporary society, television in particular, contribute to the transformation of “time-space” relationship in our daily lives. As a result of both these factors, trans-border media consumption can possibly dissolve established cultural identities and give rise to new ones. Therefore, studies have been carried out from various perspectives to examine whether trans-border television viewing really creates new cultural identities among audiences. However, from the reviewed studies we can see that the concept “identity” might not be an appropriate category for audience research of imported television. The concept of “identification” is more applicable in these cases, in the sense that it is a process toward identity change while it provides at the same time a full range of choices for cultural positioning.

On the other hand, audience research with the emphasis on cultural resistance argues that audience cultural identity or identification is not going to be changed by imported television program. According to some scholars, due to the cultural proximity factor, audience prefers watching local television programs as long as they have comparable quality to imported ones. Cultural proximity, a “compound concept” based on shared language, history, religion, ethnicity, etc., in fact has

established a new framework for examining television consumption. Moreover, it probes us to reconsider the binary opposition between the “local” and the “global”. Scholars have suggested replacing the opposition with a series of scales from sub-national, national to regional, and global. Also, as identity change is not necessarily the case everywhere, research on trans-border media consumption may start with audience’s “experience” which involves viewing pattern and media use.

Discrepancies exist not only between audiences from different countries, but also among different audience groups. Starting from early Media Effects Studies, generational differences have been recognized in television audience viewing activities. According to these studies, young audiences are more engaged in long-term television viewing and have been deemed as and the most receptive to media messages. Research on young audience shows that, in some cases, influence of cultural proximity is not to be taken for granted. The sense of cultural proximity is to be accumulated in life experience in the past. Young audience who has grown up with imported television is likely to internalize the media messages from another culture rather than resist it. As a result, identification with another culture is considered to be more common in the young audience than in other audience groups. The possible identification with another culture in youth drives our attention to a new aspect of different generations’ trans-border media consumption patterns. For the generation members who have grown up in television culture, the social “imprinting” they received is largely mediated. The generation with collective

memory mediated by media across the border gain their collective memory in a new way that is distinct from that of other generations. Therefore, comparison between the media consumption experiences of different generations may generate rich insight not only into the social and cultural impact of trans-border media flow, but also into how trans-border media interacts with social transformation.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter delineates the research design of this study. Firstly, as the basic framework of the study, two research questions are formulated. These are followed by the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach. Thirdly, methodological issues, including major methods used during the course of fieldwork, sampling procedures as well as data analysis of the study, are discussed.

Research Questions

RQ1:

How do Guangzhou youth consume Hong Kong drama?

RQ2:

How does the factor of cultural proximity affect the young audiences' consumption of Hong Kong dramas and their perception of Hong Kong?

Rationale for Using a Qualitative Approach

Quantitative studies have been carried out by different scholars on the topic of Guangzhou audiences' consumption of Hong Kong television, (Fung 1999; Chan 2000; Chen 2002), whereas, this research employs a qualitative approach. The rationale for choosing this approach is based on the specific nature of the research problems.

Since this study asked “how” questions and aimed at audiences' resourceful experiences and the cultural implications, a qualitative approach is more suitable for

looking into their detailed description of daily experience and audience's perception (Gripsrud 1990; Press 1991). Although the young audiences are at relatively similar ages, their varied cultural and social specifics make them a heterogeneous group. Moreover, the viewing experiences from different age groups are also addressed in this research. Hence, particular research techniques are needed to accommodate the audiences' diverse viewing experiences.

On the other hand, as noted above, how the consumption of Hong Kong drama and societal transformation interact is a crucial contextual issue in this study. Therefore, the discussion on their viewing experiences has to be integrated into larger frames of social, cultural and historical background. In this regard, qualitative research design appears to be more appropriate for contextual analysis as well as interpretation.

Research Methods

1. In-depth Interview:

This research was developed from one of my earlier research papers on Guangzhou young audiences' perception of Hong Kong through cross-border television viewing. With a general understanding of their consumption and perception patterns, I formulated an interview protocol and pre-tested it with several respondents from the previous study. In-depth interview was the main method used throughout the research due to its suitability to the inquiries required in this research.

The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed for high flexibility in taking the respondents' unique experiences into account. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher asks questions based on a prepared list. It is permissible to stray away from the subject area and ask supplementary questions. At the same time, the interviewee was also encouraged to provide significant information based on opinions (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). In this case, as most items in the question list were concerned on their personal histories of television consumption, the semi-structured interview was undoubtedly the best way to fulfill the research purpose.

In-depth interview proved to be a resourceful technique to take into account various experiences and perspectives. Compared to focus group interviews, which were also employed during the study, in-depth interviews yielded more details and deeper levels. In the beginning phase, the draft of interview protocol was inspired by a number of qualitative researches on media audiences, especially young audiences, as discussed in the previous chapter. During the interviews I always first started the interviews with casual conversations to build rapport with the respondents. After each interview, respondents' demographic profile including information about age, education, vocation, annual income, and family background were recorded with their permission. All interviewees agreed to be audio taped during the process.

2. Generational Comparative Studies

In order to achieve sufficient understanding about the consumption experiences of teenage and older audiences for cross-generational comparison, focus group interviews were used as pilot tests for one-on-one interviews later on. Since I knew little about these two generations, general information about their viewing activities is necessary for the study. Group interviews are useful in exploring the participants' salient topics and interests as they recall their collective memory of television. Also, they enable the participants to exchange opinions and stimulate new ideas in peer groups. These are both crucial guidance for further in-depth interviews.

Data gained from original young respondents were analyzed in juxtaposition with teenage respondents and middle-aged ones. With difference in their sense of cultural proximity with Hong Kong drama, the native/non-native dichotomy proved to be the major cause of differences in audience viewing experience as well as perception in the previous study. According to this, theoretically, four groups were needed, with two for each birth cohort. However, the emigration waves to Guangzhou and most other coastal cities in China in fact began in the 1980s, right after the inception of "Reform and Open-up policy". The number of early immigrants to Guangzhou (before 1980) is too small to be representative of the overall Guangzhou television audience. Therefore, altogether, three groups of respondents were recruited: the middle-aged natives, the teenage natives, and the teenage non-natives. After these group interviews, I chose 16 people to conduct further in-depth personal interviews.

Sampling Procedures

The first-run respondents who participated in this research were recruited through snowballing; starting with people in my personal network (Douglas, 1984). Later on, I searched for respondents in different schools, universities and working units in order to minimize the possible sampling bias. Theoretical sampling constitutes the major part of this process. Closely associated with grounded theory, theoretical sampling is the process of data collection whereby the researcher simultaneously collects, encodes, and analyzes the data in order to decide what to collect next as well as to develop the theory as it emerges (Glaser 1978). This process is controlled by the emerging theory with new codes and categories. It ceases when all the categories are already saturated, elaborated and integrated into the theory (Glaser, 1992:102).

All the respondents were selected according to several criteria set by the study. First, respondents in the target group must be between 20 to 25 years old. For the younger group the age range was 14-16 while the older group ranged from 35 to 45 years old respectively. Second, they must have spent at least one hour per day watching television on a regular basis for at least two years. Third, they must be regular viewers of drama series (not necessarily Hong Kong ones).

These age ranges of the sample were not decided in a convenient way. According to sociological theories on generation, emergence of generations depends on the

“trigger action” (Mannheim, [1928] 1952). This mostly refers to significant events that sort the population according to who experienced them first hand and who did not (Eyerman & Turner, 1998:100). In this regard, the target sample of this study, the “trans-border TV generation”, is confined to those who were born in the early 1980s to guarantee several conditions: 1. These people have been watching Hong Kong television programs since their childhood. 2. Their life was not directly affected by the “Cultural Revolution”, which ended in 1977. 3. They live in the age of “Reform and Open-up”, which started from 1979. Although the youth in general may have similar perception of Hong Kong and Hong Kong dramas, people whose ages range from 20 to 25 (born in 1980-1985) are better representatives.

Likewise, people at the age of 35 to 45 (born in 1960-1970) are those who experienced the ten-year Cultural Revolution in their childhood. For those in the younger group at the age of 14 to 16 (born in 1990-1992), the Hong Kong Handover is part of their early memory. Originally, the younger age group was expected to be between 10-15 years old. Unfortunately, pilot studies showed that most respondents under 14 years old were not able to articulate their deep-seated thoughts well, such as perception of another culture, in order to fulfill the requirements of in-depth interview.

With all these conditions considered, 42 respondents altogether were chosen for in-depth interview. In the target sample, 26 are in the 20-25 age group, with 17 natives (six males and eleven females) and 9 non-natives (one male and eight females). 10 of

them are in the 14-16 age group, with 5 natives (one male and four females) and 5 non-natives (one male and four females). The other six native people belong to the 35- 45 age group, with four males and two females.

Data Analysis

The purpose of theoretical sampling is to elicit codes from the raw data through constant comparative analysis as the data pour in (Glaser, 1978: 36). It allows for flexibility during the process of research, such as change or modification of interview questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) With the flexibility allowed by this technique, several shifts have been made to the plan and emphasis has also been changed. These changes are necessary in developing grounded theories in that, “While in the field, the researcher continually asks questions as to fit relevance and workability of the emerging categories and relationships between them.” (Glaser, 1978:39) Since several modifications were made to the interview questions, respondents were constantly contacted for follow-up interviews to ensure they provide sufficient answers.

As the study was carried out in Guangzhou, the language used in each interview was either Cantonese or Mandarin. With the respondents’ permissions to audiotape the interviews, I was able to transcribe all the content afterwards. Data analysis was then performed based on these verbatim transcripts.

Aside from concepts drawn from the reviewed literature, most categories and themes in the study emerged in simultaneous analysis. Every interview was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol. In the analysis stage, the interview transcripts were first divided into two different sets of data according to two research questions. After that, these data were compared, categorized, and developed into arguments.

Chapter 4:

Cultural Proximity in Young Audiences' Consumption of Hong Kong Drama

Based on the case of Brazil, Straubhaar(1991) argues that audiences tend to choose to view regional or national television programs despite the attractiveness of media products from “core” countries such as U.S., out of a search for cultural proximity. With certain sense of cultural proximity with Hong Kong drama, most respondents chose Hong Kong as one of their favorite sources of drama. It is also the most watched source of drama for most respondents, and particularly, the native Guangzhou youth. This chapter takes a close look into how different young audiences consume Hong Kong dramas. Through analyzing the data on their viewing preferences, pleasures and the uses they made to Hong Kong television dramas, this chapter strives to establish a profile of their viewing experience. These data provide a solid basis for further discussion on their perception of Hong Kong from their reading of these media texts.

Nowadays Cable-TV audience in Guangzhou has access to over 50 television channels that offer a variety of genres including news, sports, movies, drama series, etc. There is truly a wide range of choice for selection. In Mainland China, the entire television broadcasting industry follows the 'four level administrative' guideline, which was established in 1983 to develop radio and television broadcasting at four levels (central, provincial, prefecture and county levels). On the central level, the China Central

Television Station (CCTV), renamed from the old Beijing Television Station in 1978, currently owns 16 channels. Meanwhile, most counties, cities and provinces have their own TV broadcasters carrying multiple channels. Among these channels, those carried by satellites can be received all over China. Particularly, in the case of Guangzhou, Guangzhou Television Station (GZTV) on the prefecture level, Guangdong Television Station (GDTV) and Southern Television Station (TVS) on the provincial level have six, five, and seven channels respectively. GDTV and TVS both have satellite channels that can be received all over the globe.

Aside from Mainland channels, there are currently eight trans-border channels in Guangzhou. The major Hong Kong channels, TVB JADE (in Cantonese), ATV HOME (in Cantonese), TVB PEARL (in English), and ATV WORLD (in English), have been popular in Guangzhou since the early 1990s. Phoenix Chinese Channel (in Mandarin) which was launched in 1996, is also a Hong Kong-based television broadcaster. AOL's Chinese channel CETV (China Entertainment Television) and the News Corporation's Star-TV (Satellite Television for Asian Region) which are both in Mandarin, started its broadcast in Guangdong province in 2002. Viacom's MTV Channel, later on, was launched in 2004.

In terms of drama, options include drama series on most general channels and movie/drama channels offered by Mainland broadcasters, and those on all the trans-border channels but MTV. There are altogether six major sources of drama available for the Guangzhou audience. TVB JADE and ATV HOME are the primary sources of

Hong Kong dramas, although some Mainland channels have also purchased dramas for rerun since the 1980s. TVB PEARL and ATV WORLD, on the other hand, keep broadcasting updated movies and drama series from Europe and Americas. A number of dramas produced in Taiwan, Korea and Japan have been imported and broadcasted on many of these channels due to their programs' great quality.

As explicated in Chapter 1, Hong Kong TV programs have more cultural proximity with native Guangzhou audiences. Therefore, through the comparison between native and non-native audiences' viewing preferences, pleasures and media uses with Hong Kong dramas, how the factor of cultural proximity affects their media consumption can be investigated. The consumption of Hong Kong drama constitutes a significant part of many native youths' daily lives since their childhood, when they began to watch the prime time series on TVB JADE or ATV HOME on regular bases with their families. In contrast, non-native youth tend to watch less Hong Kong drama series than their native peers, since their parents did not understand Cantonese and prefer Mainland programs broadcasted in Mandarin or English programs on TVB PEARL and ATV WORLD with Chinese subtitles. In spite of this, Hong Kong drama is still one of the most watched television programs among non-native youth.

Guangzhou Young Audiences' Television Consumption

Hong Kong television used to lead the market for more than a decade in Guangzhou, exerting a strong influence on its media environment. It is even described as a

history of “TV Colonization”(Fung & Ma, 2002). However, in recent years, Hong Kong television channels experienced a significant decrease in market share (from over 80 percent to less than 40 percent). Studies show that Guangzhou audiences are becoming more receptive to programs of origins other than Hong Kong. This change in audience market is due to a multitude of reasons, part of which is the improvement in the quality of locally produced programs. TVB JADE still comes out on top in market share and audience rating in Guangzhou although the difference between it and some local channels is no longer that huge. The market shares by channels in 1998 and 2005 are shown in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 respectively.

Figure 4.1²

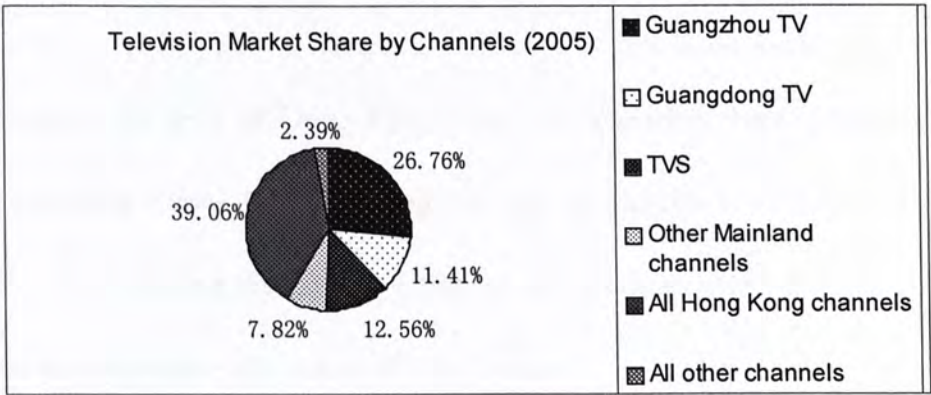
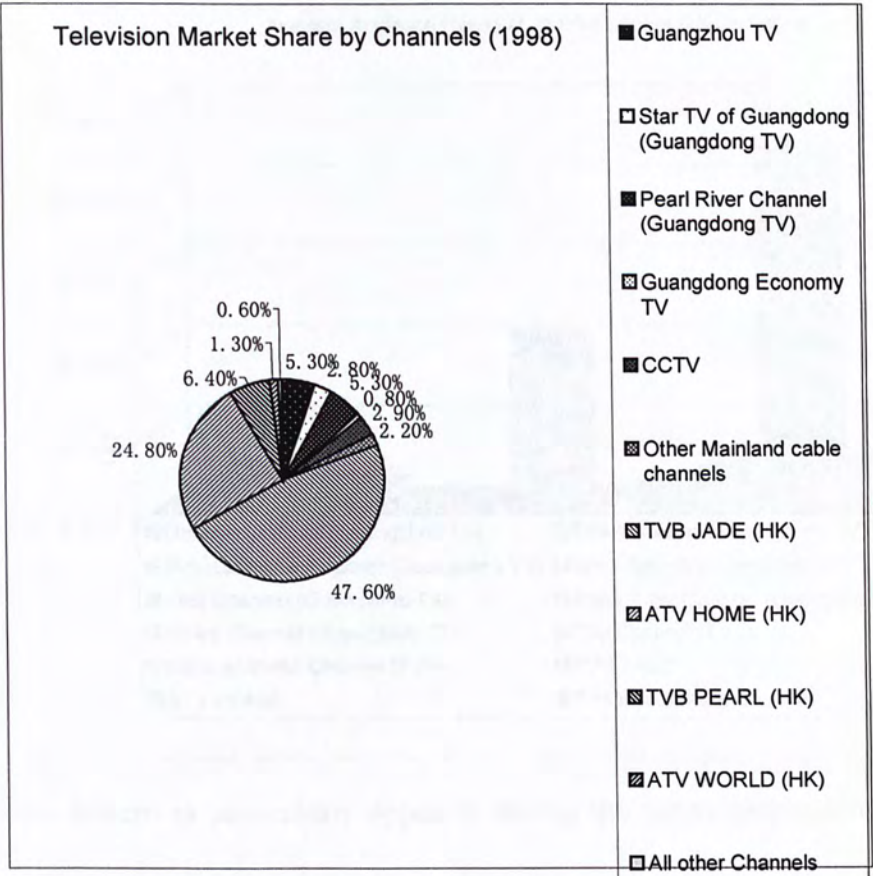


Figure 4.2³

² Data from Guangzhou City’s Social and Economic Research Group. (2006). Analysis on Television Viewing in Guangzhou Urban Citizens, 2005. Guangzhou. (internal research report)

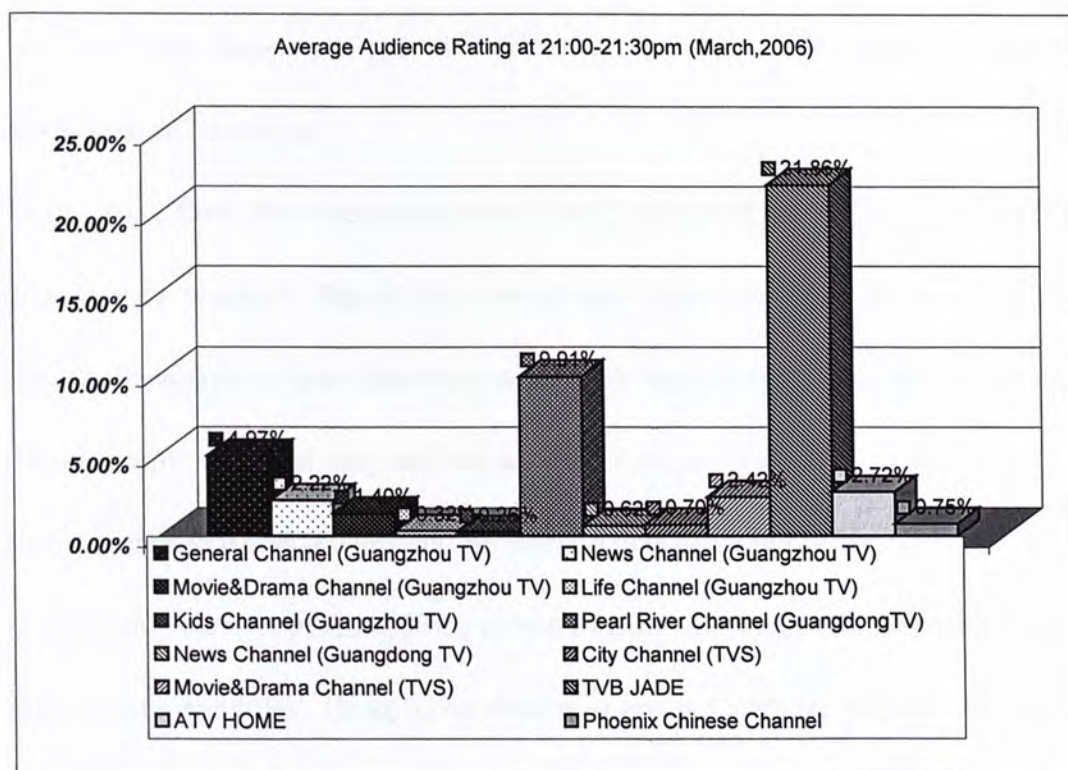
³ Data from: Chen, H.L. Guo,Z.S. & Zhu, J.H. (2002). Hong Kong Television’s Impact on Guangzhou Citizen (in Chinese). Retrieved April 2006, from China News Research Center Web site:
<http://www.cddc.net/shownews.asp?newsid=1363>



Despite the drop of Hong Kong channels in market share, watching Hong Kong primetime drama is still among the top choices for most Guangzhou audiences. Figure 4.3 shows the average rating by major channels at 9:00-9:30 PM which is the most competitive primetime slot for dramas.

Figure 4.3⁴

⁴ Data from Guangzhou City's Social and Economic Research Group. (2006). Analysis on Television Viewing in Guangzhou Urban Citizens, 2005. Guangzhou. (internal research report)



This pattern is particularly apparent among the native respondents participating in this study. During the interviews, the respondents were asked to rank the six sources of drama (Mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, America) according to how often they watch these dramas. Based on the ranking, dramas from Hong Kong ranked first, followed by Japan, then third were Korea and America. Also, all of the 17 native respondents said that they spent most of their television time on TVB JADE, its drama series in particular. The time they spent on watching dramas of other origins was not comparable to that of Hong Kong dramas. This statement was largely supported by the data on their actual frequency of drama viewing. During the interviews, respondents were asked to circle the names of the dramas they have watched in a list of all TVB dramas aired from 1994 to 2004. Most of them watched

over ten TVB dramas per year for at least three years, while several respondents watched over 20 dramas.

At the same time, the respondents cited that TVB JADE has most of the imported dramas they watched. All of them stated that they were used to watching these Korean, Japanese or American dramas in Cantonese dubbing. Besides, eight out of the 17 people said that they seldom watched dramas from places other than Hong Kong, therefore it was too difficult for them to rank other remaining sources.

Being heavy viewers of Hong Kong drama themselves, though, the non-native young respondents watch less Hong Kong dramas compared with the natives. All but one placed Hong Kong in their top 3 viewing priorities. However, only half of these non-natives reported Hong Kong as their favorite source of dramas. None of them watched more than 10 Hong Kong drama series in a single year from 1994 to 2004. On the other hand, most non-native respondents have more experience watching Mainland and American dramas.

Watching Hong Kong dramas

The primary reason why these young audience watched so many Hong Kong dramas is that these dramas are always better-produced and more entertaining than local ones, especially in the 1990s when the entertainment industry in Mainland China was far lagging behind. Both their format and content gave the young audiences a strong sense that Hong Kong was modern and “advanced”.

1. Dramas of excellent quality

These young audiences reported that Hong Kong dramas usually have riveting plots, succinct and fluent editing techniques, and lifelike scenes which make the audience easily immerse themselves into the stories. The visual finesse and unaffected acting in these dramas are also highly valued compared to those of the Mainland dramas. Since TVB and ATV both have the tradition of having their actors perform in various dramas produced during a several-year period, audience usually gets so familiar with the acting styles that they can, according to individual taste, choose which dramas to watch by the starring actors in the dramas. Therefore, the audience can truly entertain themselves by choosing their favorite drama styles instead of tolerating the banality of Mainland dramas that are usually made out of propaganda or education.

Huang (Interview No.4): My favorite Hong Kong drama series is the *Detective Investigation Files (Xing Shi Zhen Ji Dang An)*. Every criminal case was complicated and confusing, so different from those presented in many mainland detective drama series, which I could easily figure out the facts before they were disclosed. The series's success, also, cannot be separated from the excellent performance given by those great actors such as Micheal Tao, who acted extremely calm and wise and truly showed what it was like to be a professional detective.

The native respondents admitted that they watched Hong Kong dramas as a daily routine regardless of the change in quality. Still, they insisted that high quality was the major reason why they chose Hong Kong dramas over Mainland ones.

The close-to-life quality of Hong Kong dramas was praised by most respondents participated in the study. Although some of them pointed out that sometimes these

dramas might give out beautiful, illusive pictures of the modern life in Hong Kong, even those who had been to Hong Kong or had Hong Kong relatives agreed that Hong Kong dramas were comparatively more realistic than their Mainland, Japanese and Korean counterparts.

Chen (Interview No. 1): For several times I visited my aunt who lives in Hong Kong. She works as a government official. Her apartment is just as beautiful as those showed in many Hong Kong dramas. At the same time, another famous setting in Hong Kong dramas is cage homes where the poorest people live. So in a whole, I think these dramas are rather true to life.

2. Viewing Preferences and Cultural Proximity

The factor of cultural proximity seems to have significant influence on these respondents' viewing preferences. For instance, in terms of genres, some native respondents mentioned that they enjoyed comedy series and sitcoms from Hong Kong such as *Wars of Genders* (*Nan Qin Nv Ai*) and *Virtues of Harmony* (*Jie Da Huan Xi*). With full understanding of the witty lines in these dramas, the native respondents highly evaluated the entertainment quality of the said dramas. Moreover, due to these native young people's sense of cultural proximity with Hong Kong, they can truly appreciate the detailed and vivid portrayal of Cantonese family life in these dramas. Chen (Interview No.1), a senior student in college, said that she seems more familiar with the cultural traditions, customs and conventions exhibited in the dramas, like soup stewing and Buddhist worship. As a response, her interest in different aspects of Hong Kong life as shown in the dramas is aroused by this sense of familiarity.

Without inborn cultural proximity with Guangzhou or Hong Kong, non-native young audience does not have the sense of familiarity with life presented in the dramas in contrast with their native peers. When asked about their preference on the genres, most of them told me that they do not like those centering around family life which seem irrelevant to their own lifestyle. Neither did they prefer watching comedies and learning the lines, mostly due to the fact that they could barely understand many punch lines.

At the same time, closely associated with young audiences' cultural proximity, the role played by their families cannot be ignored in these young audiences' viewing experiences. For the native respondents, many watched Hong Kong dramas as daily routine with their families, no matter they wanted or not. As presented in Appendix II, a few respondents like Huang (Interview No.4) and Ye (Interview No.3) ranked American drama as their top three favorites. Nevertheless, Hong Kong drama is still their most watched program due to the viewing habits of their families.

Lu (Interview No.2): Sometimes I really want to watch imported dramas from Taiwan or foreign countries, or programs on the English channels. But I seldom have the chance. For example, last Friday I wanted to watch a reality show on TVB PEARL. There are two TV set in my home. My parents and grandparents are watching My Family (Tian Sun Ye Ye) on both of them. They refused to let me change the channel.

For the non-natives, things are even more complicated. The nine non-native respondents' families were from Henan, Inner Mongolia, Shandong, Shanghai, Hubei, Zhejiang, Jiangxi and Hunan, respectively (There are two respondents from Henan). Located at the southern frontier of China, Cantonese culture has long been considered

as less rich and exquisite than the cultures in the north area which is called the cradle of Chinese civilization. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that Guangdong province was one of the earliest in China that employed the marketization policy. The “mushroom” economy boom in Guangdong acts as a foil to its stagnancy in cultural development. In fact, it was once called a “cultural desert” in the early 1990s. In a nutshell, for people who came from the northern part of China, Guangdong was mostly viewed as a culturally inferior place compared to their hometowns.

Most of them mentioned that their parents, even without watching much Hong Kong dramas, deemed these dramas as purely entertaining, low in taste, and lacking aesthetics. Parents of these respondents, the early immigrants who came to Guangzhou in 1970-1980, are trying to repel the power of Hong Kong popular culture, represented by Hong Kong dramas. They can neither understand much Cantonese nor appreciate its culture.

Yang (Interview No.19): My parents are extremely critical on Hong Kong dramas, always telling me that watching these dramas will lower my taste in arts. Whenever I wanted to watch Hong Kong channels they would tell me they wanted to watch programs on other channels. As there is only one TV set, I have to obey them. Moreover, for many times my father tried to make me watch *Yu* opera, the local opera of our hometown Henan, which was so boring and I could barely understand.

As a result, their viewing experiences differ from the native respondents’ in terms of frequency of watching dramas from different sources. The consumption of Hong Kong television dramas by non-native youth occupies a less significant place in their daily lives compared to that of the native youth. During the interviews, all the non-native respondents mentioned that they could not watch many Hong Kong television shows

because of their parents. Nonetheless, because of the unsatisfactory quality of television programs provided in Mainland, some of these people would try to seize opportunities to watch Hong Kong dramas.

With their limited chances to watch Hong Kong dramas, non-native young people are highly selective of what to watch. Therefore, they usually pay more attention to the quality of these dramas than do their native peers. Zhang (Interview No. 20), a 24-year-old boy from Shandong province, was fascinated by the martial arts dramas adapted from Jinyong's epics. Qian (Interview No.18) and Wang (Interview No.21) both mentioned that they appreciated Hong Kong dramas' craft in picturing people struggling in opposing difficulties and finally achieving their dreams.

At the same time, influenced by their families, non-native respondents have more experience watching Mainland dramas. Accordingly, their comments on these dramas are more detailed and intensive. Three non-native respondents talked about popular historical dramas in Mainland like *Kangxi Dynasty* and *Yongzheng Dynasty*⁵. These respondents felt that they had learned a lot about the country's history and culture in the dramas. Also, Nie (Interview No.23), a 24-year-old girl working in an advertising company, even told me that she had some newfound ideas about many current social issues, like corruption in the government.

Differences in language use were noted to be an important issue. As they speak mostly Mandarin, five respondents perceived Taiwan dramas in Mandarin as

⁵ *Yongzheng Dynasty* and *Kangxi Dynasty* are two (44-episode and 50-episode) drama series based on Er Yuehe's *Luoxia Trilogy* novel produced by China International Television Corporation in 1998 and 2000. They focus on major events during Kangxi and Yongzheng's reign in the Qing Dynasty.

culturally closer to them than Hong Kong ones. Also, compared to their native peers, none of these non-native respondents criticized Korean dramas as too slow in storytelling. Five out of the 9 non-natives are actually fans of Korean dramas.

Cultural proximity is considered to be an important factor in affecting audience choices (Straubhaar, 1991) in favor of local or regional media products. As explained above, this argument is supported by data generated in this study. However, it is worth noticing that none of the youth respondents is a fan of locally produced dramas. Also, while every native respondent acknowledged the influence of cultural proximity on their choice of Hong Kong dramas in answering the interview questions, nobody, on his or her own initiative, brought it up as a major reason why s/he choose to watch Hong Kong dramas. They regarded their choice as mostly influenced by the better quality of Hong Kong TV programs, good plots and acting specifically for dramas.

3. Getting used to the “Hong Kong style”:

Grown up with Hong Kong dramas, many young audiences are so used to the “Hong Kong style” which affects their opinion on dramas. This point is best illustrated by their comments on dramas of other origins in the interviews. Famous for its humorous dialogue, optimistic narrative and speedy storytelling, Hong Kong drama differentiates itself distinctly from its Mainland, Taiwan and foreign counterparts. None of these Hong Kong drama fans expressed their fondness for the Korean drama

style, given its striking popularity all over Asia in the past five years. The native respondents also admitted that they had watched many Korean dramas such as *Autumn in My Heart*⁶ and *Dae Jang Gum*⁷. Some appeared to be so engaged that they watched these Korean dramas from their first to the last episode. Even so, they criticized these dramas as too slow in storytelling and too pessimistic about life. Similar accounts can also be found in their comments on Taiwan dramas.

In contrast, Japanese and American dramas received the most favorable comments, in attribute to their speedy storytelling style. Japanese trendy drama once prevailed in the entire continent throughout the last decade of the 20th century. It became popular when the respondents were in the middle school. Japanese drama left them many pleasant memories. According to 7 out of 17 native respondents, American drama has the best quality among dramas of all the six origins. But the number of imported American dramas has always been much smaller than that of other foreign dramas. Hence, many natives have only faint impressions of them.

The evaluation pattern above only shows central tendencies in these respondents. It is unrealistic to expect that everybody would have the same view on all these issues. In terms of drama, people watch them for different purposes. During the interview, the respondents were asked to rank the importance of different elements in affecting their choices on what to watch. These elements include creativity, entertainment value, reality, program quality, plot, actor, knowledge, and information. Their preferences of

⁶ *Autumn in My Heart* is a 20-episode drama series produced by KBS2 in 2000.

⁷ *Dae Jang Gun* is a 70-episode drama series produced by MBC in 2003.

drama from different sources are also reflected in the emphasis they put on different elements. For instance, some respondents who considered “actor” as important to dramas gave favorable comments to Korean and Taiwan trendy dramas, saying that the characters in those dramas are good-looking and fashionable.

Pleasures and Media Uses

The audience’s pleasures and media uses are discussed in relation with each other in this chapter. It is observed that most pleasures gained from media consumption are generated in the uses made by the audience. In this part, we can see that media products, (here, the television dramas), not only bring entertainment but also carry many social functions.

1. Topics in Communication

Like anywhere else in the world, the consumption of television drama carries a function in daily communication. When asked about how they made use of television dramas, the first thing that comes to mind was always that “they are good topics to chat about.” Most native respondent recalled their memories of following the same drama series with their friends and classmates and always talked about them in school.

Watching Hong Kong dramas is particularly helpful for non-native youth to make friends and enter the communities of the native youth.

Qian (Interview No.18): When I came to Guangzhou, I soon realized that everyone was watching Hong Kong programs. I had to watch at least some of the dramas to have something to chat with my new classmates, since everybody was watching them and talking about them. It was a really important way for me to take the first step in making friends.

For non-native children who are entering schools filled with native children, to talk about the stories in a popular Hong Kong drama is always a good help in making friends. As a result, these non-native young people tend to be influenced more by others in choosing dramas to watch and mostly “watch those that are recommended by friends or classmates.”

2. Linguistic Source

Of course, dramas mean more than just topics to chat about. For most native young people, the Hong Kong culture presented in television dramas has been practiced into their everyday life in the past. The most obvious form of these is that Hong Kong dramas are regarded as a linguistic source. Li (Interview No.11), a 25-year-old office worker, still remember when he and his friends learned the way to address things from the dramas and applied the witty lines to daily life during high school. Some of the respondents could list many popular lines from dramas, which was applied to everyday language in different periods. According to them, learning new words and expressions from Hong Kong dramas made them look cooler, trendier and funnier as teenagers. Besides, since these behaviors provided linguistic codes for people to share with their friends, they might also help to signify the youth's identities within groups.

In contrast with the natives who unconsciously made Hong Kong dramas as linguistic

sources, many non-native youth intentionally make TV drama viewing more as a language learning tool. Born in or coming to Guangzhou at an early age, most of these non-native youth tried to learn Cantonese and participate in local culture albeit their parents hardly did.

Wang (Interview No.21): I moved to Guangzhou from Wuhan when I was 10 years old. At that time I didn't understand a single word in Cantonese. I spent an entire summer vacation watching Hong Kong TV programs, especially dramas. After that I spoke Cantonese better than my mother, who had already worked here for more than ten years. Later on I entered a primary school and made friends with local children. is the best way to learn Cantonese.

The function in language learning is also apparent in the use of foreign dramas. As mentioned earlier, some parents are concerned about using television to help their children improve English. Many young people carry the same concern as well. It accounted for a large part of the reason why they chose to watch American dramas. "In American series like *Friends*, the actors speak in standard American English. They use very simple but practical words and sentences. According to Xu, (Interview No.26), every time he watches these dramas, he gets the feeling that his oral English becomes more fluent.

3. Knowledge about Society

Some respondents mentioned that they also learn from the dramas about fashion, though this function of Hong Kong dramas has been lost due to the prevalence of Japanese and Korean trendy dramas since the middle of 1990s.

Chen (Interview No.1): People in Japanese dramas like to dress in the latest fashion but sometimes they are too 'creative'. Hong Kong people always

dress tastefully and perfectly for different occasions. Plus, for us in Guangzhou, Hong Kong fashion trends are easier to follow and practice.

Many non-natives learn about Cantonese culture especially the traditional conventions through Hong Kong dramas. For instance, as mentioned by Qian (Interview No.18), she learned from watching the dramas not to stick chopsticks in rice at dinner. Similarly, they came to learn about important events in the history of Guangdong from the historical series in Hong Kong dramas.

Besides the material aspect, most respondents also remembered that they had learned about the intricacies of the society in their childhood, although some are aware that the stories they watched on television might not be absolutely realistic. Many respondents admitted that they seek to learn social skills from dramas. Moreover, some of them even admitted that stories in Hong Kong dramas had strong influence on their life.

Learn about business from “The Greed of Man”⁸

Zhang (Interview No.17): I was a huge fan of the “business” genre. Even though I knew nothing about business when I was in primary and middle school, I was always attracted by the life of those businessmen who lived like warriors in the battlefield.

Among these dramas, “The Greed of Man” impressed me the most. That was the first time that I was fascinated by the term “stock market”, which could make people rich overnight. People in that drama were dealing with billions of dollars! “Billion” was difficult to imagine, you know, at the time when our monthly family income was only several hundred. Besides, I remembered at that time my family also began to buy stocks in Shenzhen, and I actually saw many people around me got rich by investing in stocks. Even though they were not at all comparable to those billionaires such as Ding Xie (the main character in “The Greed of Men”), the change in their lives reinforced my impression and made me long for the life of businessmen.

At the same time, the cruelty of that kind of life also struck me. People either died because of their failures in business or killed their enemies in a brutal

⁸ “The Greed of Man” is a 40-episode drama series produced by TVB in 1992.

manner. I remembered, in the end, Ding Xie and his sons jumped from the top of a building one by one. It was such a shocking scene! And it made me realize that success and fortune in the business world came at a price.

I knew those Hong Kong dramas are fictional. But they are based on real stuff. I have to admit that some Hong Kong dramas gave me the first idea about business.

4. Idol Worship

Twenty-one out of the 26 respondents acknowledged that watching Hong Kong dramas is already an indispensable part of Guangzhou youth culture. Wang, a 21-year-old college student even claimed that, “In fact, Guangzhou youth do not have their own culture. Even since childhood, all we have is Hong Kong popular culture.” This is another reason why the native respondents watched so many Hong Kong dramas.

Aside from being practiced into daily life, Hong Kong dramas, especially those in the 1980s and 1990s, brought Guangdong people, and later people all over China, into an era of pop culture. For many young people who grew up in Guangzhou, the love of Hong Kong pop idols was one of the most significant ‘events’ in their life which marked their childhood. During the interviews, the respondents talked a lot about the Hong Kong pop idols at that time.

One of the First Idols in Hong Kong Drama: Leon Lai

Ye (Interview No.3): Leon Lai was my first idol. He struck me at the first sight when I saw him starred in *The Challenge of Life* (*Ren Zai Bian Yuan*) and *The Breaking Point* (*Jin Sheng Wu Hui*). It was more than a decade ago but I still remember the names of his character, the way he dressed, the way he moved. He looked so cool and gorgeous when riding on a motorbike holding his helmet. During many years I had a complex for boys wearing black jacket or riding motorbikes.

The characters he played were always righteous and masculine young men

who were marginalized by the society and forced to lead suffering lives but always longing for a normal life. You would easily sympathize with his ill fortune. At the same time he was so faithful to lovers and friends that he could risk his life for them. Today I still think that is the most attractive type of people to me.

At that time he was referred to as one of the 'Four Great Heavenly Kings'. I followed every TV series and movie he starred in. I was so crazy about him that I collected a whole box of pasters, photos and posters of him. Later I became a fan of his songs and bought all his cassettes.

None of the native or non-native respondents brought up Mainland TV stars in the interviews as their idols. The 20-year-old Wang (Interview No.5), a fresh graduate from a technical secondary school, claimed that she liked sports stars such as Alex Fong (Fong, Lik-Sun). So I asked her how she felt about the Olympic Champion Tian Liang, the "Diving Prince" of China. She replied with slight contempt, "He looks a bit geeky. I don't even know where he came from! Something like a small town in the inland of China?"

5. Reference for Modern Lifestyle

Hong Kong television dramas also functioned as their reference for modern lifestyle. All respondents agreed that the modern way of life in Hong Kong dramas considerably impressed them in the past decade. Born in the 1980s, these young people were taught over and over again with "Four Modernizations" as a major goal of the nation at that time. However, the connotation of this concept was too large and obscure. As children and adolescents, they could not help but wonder what it would be like to live in a truly modernized society. Accordingly, Hong Kong dramas helped to

set up perfect examples.

One example of these is the depiction of middle-class professionals in these dramas, whose lives were barely known to Mainland Chinese before the late 1990s. In a communist society, middle class was a missing word. Hong Kong dramas, especially the “professional” genre, were observed to successfully transmitted this concept to young audience in the 1990s. The “professional” genre is a collective name some respondents used during the interviews to describe a particular type of drama with a mix of genres like romance, detective, suspense, gangster, or even comedy. They used this term for the reason that these dramas were based on stories about different groups of professionals. For instance, among the dramas they raised as examples, *The File of Justice (Yi Hao Huang Ting)* series are about the life of lawyers inside and outside the courthouse; the stories in *Detective Investigation Files (Xing Shi Zhen Ji Dang An)* series are centered around a group of detective officials; *Healing Hands*⁹ (*Miao Shou Ren Xin*) series focuses on the lives of doctors. With skillfully integrated romance into the lives of these professionals, the “professional” genre caters to the young audiences’ need for romantic stories as well as their curiosity about the lives of professionals.

Doctor’s life in “Healing Hands”

Liu (Interview No.6): I had long been dreaming about being a doctor in a highly advanced and modernized hospital before I chose to enter a medical school in college. I have to say this resulted from a lot of my past experience of watching dramas and films that portrayed doctor’s lives, including the famous US drama series “Emergency Room” and several Japanese ones. But I would rank “Healing Hands” as the most important one among them.

⁹ “Healing Hands” is a drama series produced by TVB. It has been aired for three seasons in 1998, 2000, and 2005.

I used to be a fan of “Emergency Room”, so I could sense that the producers of “Healing Hands” strove to imitate it. I have to say that “Healing Hands” is incomparable to “Emergency Room” in terms of intricacy of plots, high-tech effects or social significance. However, on the other hand, this series successfully attracted me with its characters and its detailed depiction of the life of doctors.

Hong Kong dramas usually focus on characters rather than stories. As I followed that series I fell in love with the main character Paul (played by Lawrence Ng) and was influenced by his view on life. For one thing, being a professional surgeon he is so devoted to his career and would do everything for patients. He even saved the life of someone who murdered his friend. I was deeply moved by this nobleness of being a doctor. For another, he is almost a perfect guy. I could sense his warm love for his lover and friends, especially in the face of death. I know not all doctors are like him but this really made me want to have a doctor boyfriend.

Besides, at that time I had the feeling that those doctor characters in “Healing Hands” were leading wealthy and tasteful lives. They lived in beautifully decorated apartments, hung out in bars and cafes, and engaged in romantic relationships. These all look so unattainable and attractive to a high school student like me.

Apart from these cases, all the native respondents found the dramas about middle-class professionals the most attractive genre among all the Hong Kong dramas they had seen, as these dramas were entertaining as well as informative. They had imagined in their adolescence a modern society where the middle class played a major role according to Hong Kong dramas.

Similar to the native young audience, the non-native respondents considered modern series especially the “professionals” genre to be better than other Hong Kong dramas with extra novelty of stories. They likewise look for modern elements from these dramas. A similar case to the above one is Qian (Interview No.18), a postgraduate in law. According to her accounts, she built up her image of being a polished, well-spoken and tactful lawyer from many years of viewing Hong Kong dramas such as

File of Justice (Yi Hao Huang Ting).

Conclusion

This chapter provides a detailed description of the young audiences' viewing preference on dramas. Cultural proximity is a factor raised by the scholars to explain local resistance to media globalization. In this case, according to the respondents, the quality of program is a more important factor in their decision making process. Cultural proximity factor is considered important only when local or regional media products are comparable in quality to foreign products.

On the other hand, with the difference in their senses of cultural proximity with Hong Kong, it is obvious that native and non-native audiences display divergent patterns when participating in these viewing activities. In terms of Hong Kong dramas, natives have more viewing experiences. Satisfactory program quality and the sense of cultural proximity are both the reasons why they choose to watch these dramas. Moreover, most of them watch these dramas with their families, which is an important factor in the cultivation of their viewing habits. The non-natives also provided similar evaluation of these programs. With less sense of cultural proximity in these programs, they still consider the dramas worth watching because of their quality. Unfortunately, most of their families act as obstacles to their wishes.

The young audiences have practiced the Hong Kong culture they acquired from TV viewing into their daily lives. For instance, both natives and non-natives use it as

topics of discussion to socialize with others. The natives learn words and expressions from these programs, while non-natives study Cantonese dialect as they watch them. These young people also use these media texts as reference for daily lives. Besides, as Hong Kong culture prevails among Guangzhou youth for many years, they looked up to popular Hong Kong idols instead of local ones. Most importantly, Hong Kong dramas serve as a window to modernity for both native and non-native young audiences. It is through the models set by Hong Kong dramas that these people began to imagine a modernized future for the very first time. Echoing the government propaganda of 'modernization' in the early 1990s, Hong Kong dramas provided a great deal of detailed and specific examples of life in a modernized society, such as the life of middle-class professionals. These images impressed local youth and affected their views on their own lives as well as their perception of Hong Kong.

Chapter 5:

Cultural Proximity in Young Audiences' Perception of Hong Kong from Hong Kong Drama

This chapter is devoted to discussion with regard to the second research question. Before the discussion, concerns behind the discussion of transnational media are presented. It helps elucidate why this research insists focusing on the audiences' identification with Hong Kong in studying trans-border television consumption. The emphasis of this chapter is placed on detailed analysis of the strategies employed by native and non-native respondents in negotiating their cultural identification with Hong Kong. Based on these, how the factor of cultural proximity affects these youth respondents' perception of the modern Hong Kong is discussed.

Cultural impact of trans-border media

Early researches on media flow across borders were concentrated on trans-border media's effects on the change of national cultures. The concept "cultural imperialism" has brought to almost every "periphery country" the fear of homogenization of national culture. As national borders are becoming more and more permeable, many countries have begun to establish regulations to resist foreign media products (Chadha & Kavoori, 2000).

The homogenization of cultures is only part of the negative side regarding transnational media's cultural influence. These media and their cultural products also

have significant social implications. Identification with a foreign culture is a type of identification that results from the influence from a higher capitalist modernity. The current prevailing global or regional cultures, whether from the U.S., Japan or Korea, are popular for the modernized images they carried rather than their specific national culture elements. Although in the name of culture, it is the influence from a higher modernity that leads to the change. Studies concerned with modernity issues further point out that this identification results in the detachment from the local culture and the desire for a more modernized culture. In this sense, if the changes in cultural identities are supported by empirical studies, it implies that countries around the globe are becoming more homogenized under capitalist modernity.

Studies with their focus on cultural proximity have supported that cultural proximity does have impact on audiences' viewing preferences. However, even though national or regional media products may gain strong support from audiences, it does not mean that transnational media products cannot have strong impact on indigenous culture. In this sense, how the factor of cultural proximity affects audiences' reading of media products and, eventually, their cultural identification, is still left unanswered.

The case of Guangzhou young audiences' consumption of Hong Kong dramas provides an excellent opportunity for examining not only how the factor of cultural proximity functions in audiences' consumption of trans-border media products, but also how it affects their perception of the visualized Hong Kong modernity. As pointed out in previous chapters, Hong Kong dramas have strong cultural proximity

with native Guangzhou young audiences. For the non-natives, this factor is comparatively weaker. Through study into interview data from these two audience groups regarding their cultural identification, this chapter tries to probe into how the factor of cultural proximity affects their reading of Hong Kong drama and their perception of the modern Hong Kong. In this study, the focus is put on their perception of Hong Kong's image in relation to Guangzhou and whether or not they identify with the modern Hong Kong and how.

The Image of Hong Kong: A Visualized Modern City

As pointed out in the last chapter, Hong Kong dramas have set up the image of a modern city for Guangzhou young audiences, especially the natives. With over ten years of viewing experience of Hong Kong dramas, most respondents, whether natives or non-natives, have become rather familiar with at least a visualized Hong Kong. In every in-depth interview, several questions were devoted to their perception of the modern city image.

It is worth noticing that almost every respondent agreed that Hong Kong dramas are highly realistic. Hong Kong dramas, according to them, are the most realistic compared with all the dramas from the Mainland, Taiwan, Japan, Korea and America. This judgment is fairly reliable considering their familiarity with the real Hong Kong. For one thing, all but two native respondents have relatives in Hong Kong. Although non-natives have no Hong Kong relatives, most of them have traveled to Hong Kong

(yet nobody has been there for more than three times). The only thing they mentioned as “unrealistic” was the living places in Hong Kong dramas, as Hong Kong was a city famous for its limited living space.

At the same time, both the natives and the non-natives denied the interplay between their perception of TV dramas and their actual Hong Kong experience. Most of the time, they stated that their perception of Hong Kong was formed very early in their adolescence, largely based on Hong Kong television programs, whereas their actual experience of Hong Kong had just begun in recent years, mainly after the handover.

In the interviews all respondents were asked to portray their perception as well as imagination of the “modern Hong Kong.” Their descriptions showed that most of them already have in mind a rather full picture of the city, with both positive and negative aspects. Moreover, being a model in modernization, this city is much more than a mere fantasy to them.

In positive aspects, the respondents brought up the topic of Hong Kong’s environment. Hong Kong is an extraordinarily clean city considering its large population. Those who had traveled to Hong Kong shared their experience of walking around its streets, amazed by the hygiene of public places. This immediately made them think of the unsatisfactory environmental status of Guangzhou. Many took this as an embodiment of a society being well organized and administered.

Another positive comment concerns the civility of the Hong Kong people. People in Hong Kong are observed to have discipline in their road-crossing habits. Unlike

people in the Mainland, they always wait for the green light before crossing the street (Liu, Interview No.6; Ye, Interview No.3). Their good command of English was another frequently mentioned sign of advanced education system. "Even people in the market selling vegetables speak fluent English." (Qian, Interview No.18) Other opinions include that Hong Kong people are more friendly and easy to get along with (Jiang, Interview No.14); they are more creative (Zhang, Interview No.17); and they are more professional in working places (Nie, Interview No.13), etc.

Some respondents reserved their opinions on social systems, yet still many gave candid comments. Five natives and two non-natives expressed their appreciation of Hong Kong as a more equal society, where people are judged mainly by their abilities. The 22-year-old Nie (Interview No.13) asserted, "In the Mainland, your network is everything, it is much more important than your ability. Like in my parents' company, there are 'piles' of incapable leaders, some with only primary school education." Many respondents praised the social welfare in Hong Kong, saying that the welfare system in the Mainland made them feel rather insecure. The concept of "democratic society" appeared many times during the interviews when they talked about their perception of Hong Kong. Still, when they were asked to list down the positive aspects of Hong Kong, nobody directly put "freedom" or "democracy" onto the list. On the contrary, they appeared in the list of "negative" aspects from time to time. We will come across some examples of this kind in the following discussion.

On the negative aspects, what drew the most attention to Hong Kong dramas was the

highly stressful life in Hong Kong. Every respondent, native or non-native, addressed this point during the interviews. “My impression of Hong Kong people is that they walk fast, speak fast, and are always busy. It sometimes makes me feel scared of Hong Kong life.” (Ye, Interview No.3) Another related issue is the saturation of labor and limited work opportunity in this city. These conditions have made it a hyper-competitive place. “We saw those tremendous ups and downs of life in the Hong Kong dramas. I believe that they are realistic in the Hong Kong society. People are easier to make success here but they can also lose everything they have overnight.” (Qian, Interview No.18)

Some have the feeling that Hong Kong people are materialistic or utilitarian. They attributed the reason to Hong Kong being too westernized or its being a capitalist. No one gave specific examples for this, though. They mostly just have the impression that Hong Kong culture is too commercialized and the people are always going after money. (Lu, Interview No.2; Liu, Interview No.6)

Audiences’ Cultural Identification: Guangzhou versus Hong Kong

As shown in the previous chapter, the native young audiences watch more Hong Kong dramas than their non-native peers. Also, because of their strong cultural proximity with Hong Kong dramas, they can receive more information from these media texts. In this way, they are more subject to the influence of media than the non-natives. Whether this could lead to the conclusion that they would identify more with the

modernized Hong Kong will be dealt with in this part. Also, the paragraphs below will mention different attitudes and strategies employed by the native and non-native respondents

When asked to compare the cities of Hong Kong and Guangzhou, 12 out of the 17 natives agreed that they are similar to each other with some differences in the levels of development. They are very much aware of the substantial progress Guangzhou had made, yet they could still perceive the gap between the two cities. Therefore, they thought that Guangzhou people need to learn more from Hong Kong, in aspects other than economy.

In the early 1990s, the government was eager to promote the concept of modernization and “Let some people get rich first”¹⁰. Before this time, the wealthy middle class did not truly exist in the communist regime with mandatory planned economy. Hong Kong dramas provided a picture of a fully modernized society for these young people, who were at that time still kids or adolescents with fantastic dreams and a promising future in front of them. It is natural that they accepted this Hong Kong modernized style as a model for their own self-development. “In school, we were taught that the ‘Four Modernizations were our primary goals in the last decade of the 20th century. But these concepts seemed so far from our life, while the modernization displayed by Hong Kong dramas was so close.” (Fan, Interview No.7)

¹⁰ “Let some people get rich first.” is central in Deng Xiaoping’s social developing concept. Deng argues that the fact of socialism developments has proven that getting wealthy simultaneously is impossible. So the only way to realize socialism is to encourage some people to get rich first to arouse and help the rest. And ultimately the whole society will get rich together. (Deng, 1993:373)

In contrast, according to the non-natives, their fondness for Hong Kong dramas was more out of appreciating good stories than the imagination of future modernity in their own society. For one thing, seven out of nine non-native respondents admitted that they hardly pay special attention to the details of life presented in these dramas, partly due to their comparatively low interest in them. For another, although all of the non-native respondents acknowledged the high modernity of Hong Kong, most of them did not regard it in association with Guangzhou. In the interviews most non-native respondents reserved their opinions about the idea that Guangzhou could eventually achieve the same modernization as Hong Kong did, although they are not against the view that Guangzhou could learn from Hong Kong. They used the differences in political regimes to support their views.

In fact, as a result of the lack of cultural or geographical attachment, they might not even have much concern on the modernized future of Guangzhou. During the interviews, none of the nine non-natives referred to Guangzhou's future as highly relevant to their own life. Unlike their native peers, they mostly replied the questions regarding Guangzhou's future with "I have not thought this through." According to our observation, this seemingly hasty reply truly showed their indifference to the issue. It is likewise noticeable that, even though they have been living in the city for almost two decades, none of the nine non-natives watch Guangzhou news regularly. It is not difficult to infer that these people, perhaps also their families, care much less about the city they live in than Guangzhou natives.

1. A “Not So Different” Strategy

Even though they consider Hong Kong popular culture as part of their lives, most native respondents reject the idea of migration. Some respondents did not agree that the gap between Guangzhou and Hong Kong, in terms of either culture or economy, was huge. They get the feeling from their daily experience that these two cities are becoming “not so different,” and that each has its strong points.

Chen (Interview No.1), a fourth year college student, was a huge Hong Kong television fan who used to watch Hong Kong programs more than three hours a day before she entered college and lived in the campus. When asked to compare television dramas from different places, she said she prefers Hong Kong dramas since they seem to be similar to the daily life in the entire Cantonese region. Other than having the same dialect, she also felt familiar with the cultural traditions, customs, and conventions exhibited in the dramas, like soup stewing and Buddhist worship. This familiarity aroused her interest in different aspects of Hong Kong life as shown in the dramas, from higher-class to grass-root. It also allowed her to obtain some cultural information from the dramas, such as linguistic capitals and fashion styles.

Even though she had not been to Hong Kong, she believes that she could learn about it from her aunt who is a middle-class professional in Hong Kong. According to Chan, both the life showed in news programs and in television fictions are largely the same with her aunt’s depiction, therefore it all seems real to her. After watching Hong Kong

television programs for years, she knew the actors, setting and other elements much better than those in the local programs. She praised the true-to-life quality of Hong Kong television and was quite sure that audience could understand the city and its culture through the programs. Chen attributed her resistance to emigration to her belief that Hong Kong and Guangzhou are becoming “largely the same”. Although she admitted that Hong Kong used to be more developed than Guangzhou years ago, she accounted, “Nowadays it’s hard to tell whether Hong Kong is more advanced than Guangzhou. Maybe it is just more westernized.” Hence, other conditions being similar, she is more willing to live in Guangzhou instead of the “tiny little island with extremely dense population all over-burdened by stressful life.”

This opinion is also favored by Lu (Interview No.2), a freshman college student. She has relatives in Hong Kong and has been to Hong Kong for three times. She accepts the fact that Hong Kong is still more advanced than Guangzhou up to this time. However, she is also optimistic that Guangzhou would catch up in due time: “Guangzhou is developing at an incredible rate. I actually see the city changing day by day with my own eyes. Although I have lived here for more than twenty years, I get lost quite often. At the same time, Hong Kong is sort of retrogressing.” Therefore, she does not think that it would be a good idea to emigrate. However, she admitted, “If there is a chance, it would be a good idea to work in Hong Kong and earn more money.”

This “not so different” point of view demonstrates that, although Guangzhou is still

behind Hong Kong in terms of modernization, its current development has strengthened its people's confidence in the future of this city, and hence their identification with it. The evidence found from interviews with an even younger group, the 14-16-year-old respondents who grew up during the rapid development of China, also supports this argument. Details concerning this part of the research are discussed in Chapter 6.

One thing worth noticing is that respondents holding this view are mostly those who are not troubled with many problems at the time of the interview. For instance, Chen is about to finish her postgraduate studies in the best university in Guangdong province and Lu had just entered college. Though they are not from families with very high income, they are comparatively free from the pressure of employment and other life problems. Thus, their "not so different" judgment of the two cities concerned little about practical issues in the society, let alone those with social modes and regimes.

2. Cultural Affiliation as a Basic Tenet

On the other hand, more than half of the respondents (15 out of 26) acknowledged that the gap between Hong Kong and Guangzhou is still pronounced in terms of modernization, albeit the development of Guangzhou. In resisting the idea of emigration, many native respondents displayed a keen love of Guangzhou regardless of its underdevelopment compared to Hong Kong. Nie (Interview No.13) is a 22 year-old boy who is about to graduate from a junior college. His parents have been working

in a state-owned enterprise for many years and he grew up in the residential area provided for the company's personnel. Facing the fear of unemployment, he and his parents complain a lot about the nation's social systems. He considers China as a country "with a lot of problems" and raises the employment problem of college graduates as an example. He blames the society for not offering adequate jobs to its people and ascribes this to the political economic system. Also, he sarcastically said that "network", and not capability, is the most important capital in job searching for people in Mainland China.

Nie had learned about Hong Kong mainly from the television, and partly from an old Hong Kong friend. He believes that Hong Kong is an international metropolis and a highly developed society, just like Japan and Korea, while at the same time, Guangzhou is still far behind. Contrary to the optimism mentioned above, he asserted, "there is no way that Guangzhou can catch up with Hong Kong." Besides the economic aspect, he assumed that Hong Kong is an equal society where everyone could find his/her position according to capability. "People in Hong Kong have a better opportunity to develop themselves than us in the Mainland". He highly praised Hong Kong for its social welfare and security system. If there were any chance, Nie would be more than willing to work in Hong Kong. However, he was not blind to the fierce competition in Hong Kong and considered that there was little chance for a junior college graduate.

When asked if he wanted to emigrate, Nie pinpointed that he only wants to work in

Hong Kong, not to emigrate. Even though Guangzhou could never compete with Hong Kong on various aspects, Nie said that it is chief among his own tenets to die where he was born and raised. He is emotionally attached to Guangzhou to the extent that he would return to it after he has achieved his own success. He emphasized this point again and again in the interview, which revealed a possible on-going struggle inside him between the longing to move to the more modernized Hong Kong and the sense of belonging to Guangzhou.

Other native respondents also expressed their attachment to their hometown to different extents. Zhang (Interview No.17) did not even want to work in Hong Kong, saying that his family, friends and whole personal network are based in Guangzhou. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine life without them. Ye (Interview No. 3) quoted an old Chinese saying, “never go afar when your parents are alive” to express her view.

Here we need to point out that their attachment and sense of belonging is not given to an abstract concept of “local culture,” The culture is in fact their entire way of life and the environment they live in, including the lives of their families, of their extended families, and of their friends as well as people in their communities. These people grew up in this society and have learned about it for more than two decades. They generally have the feeling that there is a whole system of knowledge that one needs to live in a culture or a society and hence it would be a huge waste not to make use of it. Likewise, it would be even more difficult for a person to emigrate and start the learning process all over again.

3. Aligned with the Nation

There are also respondents who considered cultural factor, in a narrow sense, referring mainly to arts, traditions and related activities, as the most important elements in comparing the two cities. In other words, even if Hong Kong is more advanced than Guangzhou on many aspects, it is not attractive to them because of its “poorness in culture” .

Liu (Interview No.6), a college student majoring in Medicine, talked about this most of the time during the interview. Similarly, she does not resist working in Hong Kong for a while. As a medicine major, she acknowledges that Hong Kong’s technology is still ahead of that of Guangzhou and without question, people could learn about the most advanced technologies all over the world in Hong Kong. But then, in her view, Hong Kong is a wealthy upstart society without cultural roots, just like the US. She considers Hong Kong people to be utilitarian, due to the excessive commercialization of the whole society, thus they are also less engaged in culture. According to Liu’s account, despite giving favorable comments on Hong Kong’s achievement in modernization, she is not in favor of its major characteristics such as commercialization and mass culture.

She asserted that, “I would not deny that Hong Kong has its superiority in technology. However, it has a half-Chinese, half- Western culture without a sense of depth, which seems wired to me.” Similar to other respondents, she likes Hong Kong popular

culture as well. She agrees that Hong Kong has a prolific popular culture, which has influenced Guangzhou people so profoundly that it constituted a large part of Guangzhou culture itself. Yet according to her, this culture is only depthless. As a result, her criticism extended to the local culture in Guangzhou, stating that “Guangzhou is not rich in its own culture, either. But fortunately, China as a whole has a brilliant history of culture, which is rich enough for Guangzhou people to affiliate with.”

Liu is not keen on Cantonese culture as the respondents mentioned above and obviously does not consider that Cantonese region constitutes a unique culture sphere, let alone Hong Kong. In the same way that Guangzhou is inseparable from Mainland China, she regarded Hong Kong as somehow closely associated with the West. When talking about emigrants from Guangzhou to Hong Kong, she said she does not think Hong Kong could be an ideal place for their permanent residence, due to the lack of its own culture. In this sense, she thought of it as “a springboard for overseas emigration.” She identifies more with national Chinese culture than with the local one, which gives her a seemingly higher position in judging them. In fact, Liu’s preference for a holistic national Chinese culture over Hong Kong commercial culture can be separated into two criticisms, one to a popular provincial culture from the perspective of a traditional national one, and another to western capitalism from the perspective of Chinese socialism.

To make the second criticism even more explicit, some comments directed the

criticism to the politics in Hong Kong. Some respondents showed little interest in Hong Kong's democracy, though they were critical of the CCP government as well. Chen (Interview No.1) described the political situation in Hong Kong as "a farce that always makes me laugh." Lu (Interview No.2), said that she found it really difficult to understand Hong Kong people's political behaviors: "I always feel that they abuse their political rights. Why do they have to quarrel over every little thing and hold demonstration all the time? They can just write to the government and negotiate with it. I beg the government to care about what the people think." In her mind Cantonese people should be gentle and peaceful, not fanatical about politics.

Some of the non-native respondents were from military families living in Guangzhou Military Area Command. Generally speaking, they received more political education from the CCP than the natives due to their families. As such, they were particularly critical of the political system in Hong Kong. Wang (Interview No.21) expressed her disapproval of the "political fever" among Hong Kong people. She used the voting rate in the legislative council election to illustrate that, "Overly high voting rate is a sign of large-scale dissatisfaction with the society. It is not as good as what is said in the newspaper. I am suspicious of extreme democracy, and believe that public opinion may not always be rational." Wang held an eclectic view on this issue and hoped that China would learn some good experience from Hong Kong without turning exactly the same.

Another non-native, Yang (Interview No.19) made the same comment as that from

most other respondents that, there is too much democracy and liberty of speech in Hong Kong. She stated that the quality of democratic politics in Hong Kong should be improved, and suggested that practical, down-to-earth thinking is most needed in Hong Kong. Yet this point of view is a sign of the lack of education on politics in Hong Kong. "We studied politics from primary school. Even though the stuff in the textbooks might not be totally true, it did cultivate our ability of thinking about politics. In Hong Kong, people know nothing besides those big terms."

4. Identification with Modern Lifestyle

Contrary to the native young people, most of the non-native youth respondents did not reject the idea of immigration to Hong Kong. Although they never felt culturally attached to Guangzhou, they agreed that it was after all a nice place to live in. However, Hong Kong is more modern and advanced, therefore it is suitable for their self-development purpose.

Qian (Interview No.18) is a first year postgraduate student in Law who moved to Guangzhou at age 12 with her parents who were individual business people from Inner Mongolia. She said her family had changed their living style a bit after they moved to Guangzhou, for instance, in dietetic habit. She can understand Cantonese but still could not speak it as well as Guangzhou natives. She used Mandarin most of the time, especially when making friends. She does not feel attached to the Cantonese culture, nor does she feel that she is part of the Cantonese people. But she regards Guangzhou

as an immigration city, “a city of hybrid culture, with some of the components from other cultural spheres in China, brought by immigrants from other places.”

She learned about Hong Kong mainly through dramas, from which she got the impression that it is “easier to succeed”, in Hong Kong. “Most of the protagonists succeed in business in the end,” she ascribes this reason to the fact that Hong Kong is closer in economic progress to the advanced Western countries, “just like what is shown in the TVB drama *Hidden Treasures* (Ya Liao Jie De Jin Dan), one can succeed much easily with foreign capitals.” She talked about her job-hunting experience in Guangzhou and the high salary jobs in Hong Kong. She knew that there was more chance in the Pearl River Delta compared to those in the inland regions, but considered that not comparable to Hong Kong.

Wang (Interview No.21), also a postgraduate student, is another example of this type. Having moved to Guangzhou during primary school, she had only faint memories about her hometown in Hubei. After more than a decade, she is still not used to speaking Cantonese in school and with friends. In comparing the two cities, other than economic factor, she cared more about their social environments. She feels that Guangzhou is a relatively good society, but compared to Hong Kong, whose social mechanism is complete enough to guarantee justice and fairness, it is still left behind. Apart from this, Wang praised Hong Kong for providing a nice environment for everyone to develop his/her own personality. She pointed out that, “in the Mainland, most people have to follow the only route to succeed, with the sole purpose of earning

a living, instead of doing what they are actually interested in.” She owed this respect of personality to the humanistic cultural influence from the West.

In terms of deciding where to settle down, Wang believes that most non-native youth including her are more dispassionate and thus rational than Guangzhou natives, largely due to their early experience of emigration for the reason of pursuing a modernized life. This “rationality” leads them to seek for the best place for themselves, not being hindered by the provincial cultural attachment. Wang admitted that she never cared about “leaving her hometown” and whether or not she could adapt to the culture of Hong Kong. Her major concern is always the possibility of having access to a promising future.

Previous migration experience, from this research, turned out to be one of the most influential factors in affecting people’s cultural identification. Without the sense of belonging, non-natives from immigration families enjoy more flexibility in manipulating and re-orientating their identification or even identities.

Likewise, even for native Guangzhou youth who have strong sense of belonging to their own city, the experience of living outside their hometown or outside the country may contribute significantly to their perceptions, their thoughts and identification. Li (Interview No.9) went to college in Zhejiang province and is now a postgraduate student in Hong Kong. She acknowledges that Hong Kong dramas had provided her the first imaginary picture of a modern society. Yet, after four years’ study in Zhejiang, she learned a lot about cities along Yangtze River, especially Shanghai, a city which

has another kind of modernized style. Moreover, during her stay in Hong Kong, she got the chance to know more about other countries like the US. Now she enjoys a lot in experiencing different cultures and societies as well as different styles of modernization, thus would not confine herself to any specific place. "My life in Zhejiang and in Hong Kong has a huge impact on me. In the future, I might go to live in Shanghai or the cities around it for a while, or I might try to start my new life in the States. They are both fascinating to me." She does not let cultural difference become a barrier to her dreams, but she is still more attached to Guangzhou.

Yao (Interview No.16) spent the first 22 years of her life in Guangzhou and went to the US for further studies. Under the long-term influence of Hong Kong dramas, she also wanted to be a doctor. In the interview, she shared significant changes in her perception of cultures. At the beginning, she planned to pursue a degree overseas and then come back to Guangzhou. After a year, she found that being an immigrant to the US was also an acceptable option, thus she stayed there for two years. Later, she re-discovered her need to live in a familiar cultural sphere. She considered Hong Kong to be the best choice to settle down as "It displays a perfect blend of western modernized society and Chinese or Cantonese culture. It's just what people like me need for life." In a nutshell, identification with modernization is just as mobile as identification with culture, especially for people in their early twenties, who have every possibility in life. Their self positioning depend largely on their sense of belonging.

5. Going to the More Modernized

There are only two non-native respondents who refused to immigrate to Hong Kong. However, they are both planning to immigrate to other countries. Born in Guangzhou after her parents left Shandong, Yang (Interview No.19) feels culturally attached to neither Guangzhou nor Shandong. Just like other non-native youth, she did not speak much Cantonese and watched less Hong Kong programs than natives since her parents prefer CCTV and Shandong Satellite TV to local and Hong Kong channels.

Yang began to love American television programs much more than Hong Kong ones in recent years. When asked for her opinion about Hong Kong culture, she said she is much less interested in it than those of the US and Europe. The same is true with the issue of television programs, she is more in favor of the US and British styles of modern culture. Yang used fashion as her example and pointed out that Hong Kong people are always following Japanese fashion trends, scrambling for these without their own opinions. From her point of view, it showed that this city at least could not be considered as having a mature fashion culture.

Yang did not want to immigrate to Hong Kong as she was more attracted to the US and Britain. Her conclusion on Hong Kong was somewhat similar to the criticism of Liu. However, there is a big difference when we take a look deeply into the issue of modernization in their narratives. Contrary to Liu who prefers traditional culture to Hong Kong modern culture, Yang is actually in favor of modern culture. Her refusal to immigrate to Hong Kong resulted from her perception that Hong Kong is not

“modernized” enough as US or Britain.

Wei (Interview No.24) is another non-native respondent, whose family moved to Guangzhou when she was only two years old. She finished college two years ago and just went to Canada for her MBA. Unlike the case of most other non-natives, her parents were always busy working and did not interfere much with her TV viewing. Compared with other non-natives she spent much more time watching Hong Kong dramas, ranging from one to three hours per day before she went to Canada. During the years in Guangzhou, she always tried to blend herself into local natives and spoke Cantonese with them. Based on her account, she understood Cantonese culture quite well. However, she is still reluctant to describe herself as “Guangzhou-ese”.

The modern image of Hong Kong in the dramas impressed her in the past. She admitted that years ago, she would be happy to migrate to Hong Kong, yet now she was more satisfied with life in Canada. “In my view, Canada is now much closer to socialism or Communism than is China. There are policies to help the poor. Few people can make huge amount of money and few have to suffer poverty.” She regarded herself as having a cosmopolitan personality. Now she is with a Venezuelan boyfriend and has many close friends from various parts of the world, just like when she lived in Guangzhou where she was willing to enter the native world. According to her, cultural differences do not constitute barrier in no matter where one is, either Hong Kong or Canada. Moreover, sometimes they might be the source of curiosities and interests.

From the above cases we can see that, with the difference in their sense of cultural proximity, native and non-native respondents in fact have contrary views with regard to their identification. Although the native respondents displayed high identification with Hong Kong popular culture, as shown above, most of them tend to reject being labeled as potential emigrants to Hong Kong. They highlight their attachment to local culture using different strategies. Some have criticisms to Hong Kong in various aspects, stating that Hong Kong is retrogressive in economy, immoderate and immature in politics, stressful and utilitarian in social life, poor in culture, etc. However, nobody denied that Hong Kong is still a more advanced city than Guangzhou in all the given aspects.

Being attached to Guangzhou in the first place, these natives displayed diversity in the strategies they used to negotiate their struggling desires. People such as Chen and Lu tried to minimize the difference between Guangzhou and Hong Kong and put strong faith in the future of Guangzhou. People like Nie are aware of the difference yet uses personal “basic tenet” to state their affiliation with Guangzhou. Others like Liu criticize the commercial culture or capitalist politics in Hong Kong to affirm their loyalty to their hometown.

Deep in their complicated attitudes towards Hong Kong, most natives showed their implicit desire for Hong Kong’s modernity by expressing their willingness to work in Hong Kong. This gesture of “preferring working than emigrating” which allows them

to enjoy modernity while showing loyalty to cultural affiliation, can be considered as a compromise between their desire for the sense of belonging and the desire for modern life.

On the other hand, all the non-native respondents have much weaker sense of belonging than their native peers. They do not have to struggle between their sense of belonging and their desire for modern life, or make any negotiations. In their narratives, the issue of belonging was hardly mentioned by non-native respondents, whereas, modern lifestyle is their major concern. Their unique early experience provides them a rather flexible position by cutting off their provincial cultural affiliation.

In all cases, the issue of modernization took a central place in the narratives of non-native respondents. All of them chose to give priority to modernization factor in considering whether to emigrate or not. Closely associated with this, these non-native respondents admitted that they are not culturally attached to anywhere and do not even pay attention to culture issue. As a result, these young people have shared a unique identity other than “Guangzhou-ese” since their early childhood. None of them could give a definite answer when they were asked where they are from. As pointed out by Wang, because they are used to a marginal identity that was not bound to geographical locations, they did not care about whether or not they could be accepted by any culture. The absence of the sense of belonging gives them more freedom in choosing a place to live. In sharp contrast with native youth who are always sensitive to culture issue and

rejected to be labeled as someone willing to emigrate due to modernization factor, these non-native respondents expressed clearly that they thought much of modernization issues.

Meanwhile, people like Qian and Wang expressed willingness to immigrate to Hong Kong for the reason of modernization. The strategy they used was simply to drive the issue of cultural belonging out of the battle. This strategy seemed to work well, in that they do not have to face their identity confusion and can take advantage of a cosmopolitan modern identity. As a matter of fact, Yang and Wei were the strongest advocator of the modern lifestyle among all the respondents. They refused to emigrate for the reason that Hong Kong is not “modernized” enough for them.

The “desire for emigration” in this study was an important question during interviews. However, it is not a direct indicator of strong identification. Apparently, it is wise to use this desire to investigate people’s cultural identification in a study like this, for it urges people to elucidate their reasons why they have or do not have this desire, and to explain their own choices. However, using it as an indicator has several limitations. For one thing, there are many factors, besides cultural identification, that contribute to people’s desire for emigration. The desire for certain aspects of a modern city, such as modern lifestyle, higher income, better working environment and social security, might outweigh their resistance to other aspects of the society, and result in complicated attitudes like identification with resistance. So far, there is no respondent who is objective and critical enough to perceive Hong Kong in these oppositional

ways.

For the other, practical issues such as their ability to work and fit into the Hong Kong society, or their chances to succeed in various tense competitions, could affect their decisions. People who think of themselves as not that competitive would not consider emigration. Even though during interviews, respondents were asked to put themselves into a hypothetical situation, most of them would rather offer conservative answers. In this sense, their preferences on working to immigration still indicate high degrees of identification with Hong Kong.

Conclusion: the Factor of Cultural Proximity in Media Perception

As mentioned above, most native respondents were aware that Hong Kong television had been too overwhelming in Guangzhou popular culture during the time they grew up. Also, they were aware that the power of Hong Kong culture was rooted in its higher modernity, which resulted in both the high technological quality of cultural products and the fascinating content within. From the consumption of Hong Kong dramas, these people shared with the modern experience visually during the entire period they grew up. That is the process in which the modern information has been internalized by Guangzhou native youth throughout these years.

In fact, the significance of Hong Kong drama being a 'window to modernity' was most prominent in the 1990s. Scholars have pointed out that Hong Kong TV programs meet the desire of post-socialist China to 'leap' into global modernity (Fung & Ma, 2002).

During these years, their relations with Hong Kong people functioned to reinforce the modernized image of Hong Kong. Many of the respondents depicted their experience of seeing their Hong Kong relatives bringing daily products or exotic fruits to their family in their childhood, and their surprise and impression about them. Most of the native respondents admitted that they had considered Hong Kong as the ideal modernized model for Guangzhou.

Here, the issue of cultural proximity plays a central part. As Hong Kong and Guangzhou people speak relatively the same dialects, and they share a lot of cultural conventions. Hong Kong dramas, particularly in the early 1990s, these have provided a plausible modernized future for the imagination of Guangzhou people. It is even more the case among the youth respondents, who were born after 1980. Unlike the generations prior to them, these people do not have much memory of being under a communist left-leaning administration and a stringent thought control all centered on communist social movement. Instead, they witnessed the country's economic development and slackened antagonism against capitalism as well as ideological propaganda. Besides, they acquired Hong Kong popular culture with the social norms behind as they grew up (Chan, 2000). These experiences had helped many of them form the idea that the major difference between Guangzhou and Hong Kong was a matter of degree in development. When asked to compare these two cities, most of the respondents believed that "Guangzhou is becoming more and more like Hong Kong", or "Guangzhou may become similar to Hong Kong after we enter WTO for certain

years.”

However, on the other hand, this “internalization” of Hong Kong cultural messages does not seem to be directly leading towards total identification with Hong Kong. During the interviews, the respondents were asked whether they would consider moving to Hong Kong. With the superiority in both cultural proximity and modernization, Hong Kong has full reason to be regarded as a nice choice for emigration. However, most of the native youth respondents rejected the idea of immigration to Hong Kong and emphasized their cultural affiliation to Guangzhou as their hometown.

For the non-native respondents with little cultural proximity, at the same time, does not result in their lack of identification with Hong Kong. In fact, they were more open to the idea of migration to Hong Kong. Although they all agreed that Guangzhou is after all a nice place to live in, they considered Hong Kong as more modern and advanced, suitable for their self-development purpose.

The case of Guangzhou young audience shows that the factor of cultural proximity can mean much more than mere audience preference in watching television programs (Straubhaar, 1991). As a factor rooted in audiences’ own consciousness, cultural proximity may have impact on their identities. For example, on one hand, it in fact facilitates local identification with a regional cultural center across border, which is actually a threat to local or national cultural unity. On the other hand, its role in this is rather paradoxical. To have a sense of cultural proximity requires certain sense of

cultural attachment and belonging in the first place, which holds those people back from strong identification with Hong Kong culture. Non-natives, in the contrary, have internalized less cultural information, but they have learnt enough about this modern city. Furthermore, there is little problem in their sense of belonging that will stand in their way towards identification with a more modern culture.

Chapter 6:

Guangzhou Young Audiences in a Cross-Generational Context

From the previous chapters we see that the factor of cultural proximity has different impacts on the young respondents' viewing activities and their cultural identification by comparing the native respondents with the non-natives. Still, in general, these young people have received considerable influence from Hong Kong dramas and to a large extent identified with Hong Kong culture. This is a unique phenomenon that never happened in China before.

In comparison with other generations, these youth have their distinct viewing experiences and perception of Hong Kong. As pointed out in the first chapter, these young respondents can be categorized as the "Hong Kong TV Generation", since they grew up at a time when Hong Kong media penetrated the local culture. As changes in the Chinese society began to take place, people would look at media from different perspectives and perceive the information they carried in brand new ways. This can be illustrated by the sharp contrast between public views on Hong Kong television today and in the late 1980s, when watching Hong Kong television was considered as expressing sympathy to class enemies. On the individual level, one's age and past experience will affect his or her perception of media texts. It is unlikely that people at the age of 40 still have identical perception of dramas as people in their twenties. Of course, no one can assume anything before evidence is introduced.

This is why respondents from other age groups were recruited in this research to share their media related experience. In order to put the young audiences in a cross-generational context, I also interviewed the native middle-aged audiences and both native and non-native teenagers. There was one group of natives in the older cohort (aged 35-45) and two groups of respondents (natives and non-natives) who belong to the teenage birth cohort (aged 14-16). The comparison starts with the viewing preferences, their perception of Hong Kong, and then moves to their views on cultural identification.

Generational patterns in media consumption

The viewing preferences of the middle-aged and teenage respondents differ considerably from those of the youth group in the study. Accordingly, the patterns displayed in their viewing pleasures and media uses differentiate one from another.

Table 6.1 Audience Rating by Major Channels (Excerpt from the Original Document)¹¹

	CCTV 1	CCTV 3	CCTV 5	CCTV 6	CCTV8	CCTV (News)	GZTV (General)	GZTV (News)	GZTV (Movie/ Drama)	GZTV (Economy)	GZTV (Life)	GZTV (Competition)	GZTV (Shopping)	GDT V (Pearl River)	GDT V (Sports)	TVS2 (City)	TVS4 (Movie/ Drama)	ATV HOME	TVB JADE	Phoenix (Chinese)	All Other Channels
Male	4.16	1.18	2.81	0.62	0.65	0.88	18.03	3.23	3.29	0.72	0.62	3.59	0.17	7.91	3.17	2.20	5.03	6.99	25.41	1.23	13.36
Female	4.09	1.24	1.65	0.39	0.70	0.68	18.97	3.31	3.94	0.67	0.65	1.21	0.16	8.23	1.41	2.45	5.07	6.75	25.30	2.07	10.89
Age																					
All Above 6	4.12	1.21	2.23	0.51	0.67	0.78	18.50	3.27	3.61	0.70	0.63	2.40	0.17	8.07	2.29	2.33	5.05	6.87	23.31	2.18	10.91
13-18	3.17	0.56	1.20	0.40	0.56	0.27	18.38	2.41	2.80	0.40	0.51	1.19	0.13	8.23	2.20	2.63	4.67	7.15	27.14	1.46	14.41
19-25	3.11	1.27	2.65	0.28	0.88	0.49	14.79	3.12	2.53	0.33	0.44	3.01	0.08	5.79	2.62	2.64	5.68	6.00	27.47	2.02	14.59
36-45	4.35	0.94	1.34	0.32	0.70	0.55	19.30	2.94	4.55	0.66	0.82	2.98	0.21	7.84	2.45	2.63	5.31	6.96	23.45	1.71	9.80
Education Level																					
Primary	2.25	0.59	0.88	0.29	0.52	0.64	19.64	2.90	3.42	0.31	0.69	0.79	0.12	9.66	1.45	2.47	3.82	7.93	29.59	1.15	10.91
Junior Second	2.71	0.58	1.52	1.08	0.38	0.68	22.82	3.15	3.14	0.98	0.56	1.79	0.13	8.92	1.58	2.48	5.34	7.93	23.16	1.44	9.54
Senior Secondary	3.85	1.28	2.44	0.46	0.58	0.72	18.49	3.35	3.65	0.70	0.70	2.75	0.21	8.05	2.54	2.13	5.61	6.88	22.92	2.29	10.18
Junior College	4.91	1.54	2.45	0.33	0.78	0.85	16.02	3.15	3.61	0.75	0.63	2.65	0.12	7.42	2.22	2.64	4.32	5.88	24.33	2.49	12.70
University and above	8.33	2.00	3.52	0.39	1.53	1.26	14.86	3.73	4.39	0.59	0.46	3.19	0.18	6.17	3.39	2.24	4.78	5.75	16.29	3.44	13.21

¹¹ Data from Guangzhou City's Social and Economic Research Group. (2006). Analysis on Television Viewing in Guangzhou Urban Citizens, 2005. Guangzhou. (internal research report)

Table 6.1 shows the audience rating in different audience markets by channels. We can see that three groups of audience (13-18, 19-25, 36-45) display similar patterns in the ranking of their most-watched channels. TVB JADE, GZTV (General), GDTV (Pearl River) and ATV HOME are the top four on their viewing lists. At the same time, diversity is noticeable from the table. Among these three age groups, audiences at the age of 36 to 45 are heavier viewers of CCTV1 and GZTV (General) and light viewers of TVB JADE. Audiences at the age of 19 to 25 prefer TVB JADE but show little interest in GZTV (General), GDTV(Pearl River) and CCTV1.

It can be seen from these figures that audience at the age of 36-45 tends to watch more local and national programs than the other groups. Also, audience at the age of 19-25 mostly prefers Hong Kong programs. Although these three age groups cannot be equated with the cohort groups of respondents in the study, they embody general tendencies among Guangzhou audience. In fact, these tendencies were all apparent in the viewing experiences shared by the respondents participating in the research.

1. Watching TV in Daily Life

Young audiences above 20 are referred to as the first “TV Generation” in this study due to many reasons. Among these, the primary one is that a larger part of their life history was accompanied by television. Most youth respondents participating in this study watched TV for around two hours per day in their childhood and adolescence. As introduced in the previous chapters, watching television is not just a time-killer, but also an important component of their daily lives.

Middle-aged respondents in this research spend even more time on television than the youth respondents. However, at the same time, the importance of television in their lives is comparatively lower. All of these six respondents have families and work regularly from 9 AM to 5 PM. After work, they mostly spend their spare time on watching television with their families. Based on their account, all of them spend more than three hours per day watching television. This is more of a daily routine than anything else. "I would watch whatever is shown on TV, even the commercials. Of course, I may not watch them attentively all the time. It is just natural for us to have the TV on in the background." (Wu, Interview No.30)

In comparison, the position of watching television drama in the teenage respondents' daily lives is even lower. Grown up in the age of Internet, most teenage respondents admitted that they spend more time in front of their computers instead of the television, although they all claimed themselves as drama fans and would spend about an hour watching TV daily.

Huang, (Interview No.34): I read news online, chat with friends, play games... Sometimes I get bored and may even download drama series and watch them on the computer. I feel comfortable watching things on a computer screen. I don't have to follow them everyday. So it's more convenient."

In a nutshell, in the lives of these teenage respondents, television dramas are playing similar but less important roles as they did to the young adults' in the past. Hong Kong dramas are still popular yet not as unique and influential as they used to be. Born in the age of multi-media, grown up with quality dramas of multiple sources, these teenagers now have unprecedented freedom of choices in spending their spare time.

2. Viewing Preferences : Hong Kong Drama versus Mainland Drama

For the native youth group, as delineated in Chapter 4, the dramas they watched most frequently were from Hong Kong, Japan and Korea or America. Among these, Hong Kong is the primary source of drama for these respondents. The time they spend on watching dramas of other origins was not comparable to that of Hong Kong dramas. Cultural proximity with Hong Kong and their family viewing habits both have influenced their choice of dramas to watch. Basically, they make their choice mostly out of the quality of Hong Kong TV programs, such as good plot and acting, specifically for dramas.

Compared to their native peers, non-native youth respondents tend to watch more Mainland dramas. Some reported that they could learn things about Chinese history and the society they live in from these dramas. With their parents' encouragement, they also watch more American dramas than the native youth. In spite of these, all non-native respondents considered Hong Kong dramas as most important in their television viewing experience.

Most middle-aged respondents tended to talk only about dramas that were produced in Hong Kong and Mainland China. When asked to rank the six sources of drama (Mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, America) according to how often they watched them, two of the respondents only ranked Mainland and Hong Kong, saying that they hardly watch dramas from other countries. Generally, these middle-aged audiences, including those who watch Hong Kong dramas most frequently in daily life,

gave rather high appraisal to Mainland dramas as they stressed the importance of reality and information sources. Hong Kong dramas, on the other hand, were mainly used to fulfill their need for entertainment.

On the other hand, born in the 1990s, the teenage respondents have had much more options in terms of watching television dramas than other age groups participating in this research. They had no experience of living with poor-quality TV programs with propaganda purpose. In terms of sources of drama, they were no longer confined to only one or several, like what people in the other groups did. In fact, within the four types of most-watched dramas by the other groups, they grew up with Hong Kong and Japanese dramas in the prime of the drama's popularity, and later, with the prosperity of Mainland and Korean ones. Moreover, after the launch of Hong Kong and other trans-border channels on cable TV network in the 1990s, the spread of digital TV services provided them with unprecedented opportunity to watch programs from all around the globe. Naturally, audience at this age has diverse preferences in watching dramas, which can also be inferred from the accounts of the ten respondents in this group. When asked to rank the sources of drama according to their preferences, Mainland, Hong Kong, Korea and all appeared in the first position more than once. According to these respondents, a common tendency is that they are now watching more and more dramas from places other than Hong Kong. In terms of viewing preferences on sources of drama, the top choice made by the five native teenage respondents was Korea (with two votes), Hong Kong (with two votes) and Mainland (with one vote). They are also most native teenage respondents' top three choices,

with their positions in different orders.

The non-native teenagers were the only group where nobody ranked Hong Kong drama as their first preference. It is not even in the top three choices made by all non-native teenage respondents except for one respondent. Among the five non-native respondents, two considered Korean dramas as their first choice. Another two picked Mainland dramas and one chose American dramas.

1) Watching more and more Mainland Dramas

As shown in the previous chapters, respondents of the “Trans-border TV Generation” care rather little about Mainland dramas. Based on their early experience, still many people, mostly natives, regarded Mainland dramas as having poor quality. For the non-natives, some found that they could learn about history and the current society from these dramas. Still, few of them would spend their time watching Mainland dramas unless they were already fairly popular and constantly recommended by others.

In contrast, the middle-aged respondents all considered that the landscape of Mainland dramas was very different from that in the past. Back in their youth, dramas on Mainland channels were monotonous and tedious, with a major purpose of propaganda. But now, the industry offers a wide variety of programs. Compared to dramas in the past, they considered that Mainland dramas nowadays are better produced. Some of them have excellent quality, and have even exceeded Hong Kong dramas. Contrary to the indifference toward Mainland TV industry by the youth respondents, middle-aged

audiences are actually delighted and take pride with its progress. All of them expressed their confidence on Mainlanders' potential in building their own televisual culture.

Jiang (Interview No.28): "In the past, censorships were too rigid on televisions. It was not because we did not have the ability to produce something good. After all, we have this profound cultural tradition. Plus, there are so many talented people in the Mainland, much more than those in Hong Kong, I would assume."

Moreover, they appraised Mainland dramas as more seriously produced with depth as well as complexity. Many seek to reflect the reality or provide new thoughts into the history. In terms of reality, many modern dramas attempt to probe into social issues such as the loss of state-owned property, corruption in business or government, and drug abuse. These middle-aged audiences stated that they had absorbed information about the society and gained new insights from these dramas with high relevancy to social life in these days.

Case 1. Opinions on "Black Hole"¹² Series:

In the case of corruption issue, these respondents raised the drama series "Black Hole," starring the famous Chinese star Chen Dao-ming, as an example. The series portrays Nie Ming-yu, son of the vice mayor, a young enterpriser in Tian Du City. At the same time, he is also the secret leader of a criminal gang. He sets up gambling houses and profits from smuggling. In order to facilitate smuggling activities, he bribes a great many government officials. Sergeant Liu Zhen-han, the sworn brother of Nie, is appointed to investigate criminal activities done by Nie's group. In tracking evidence to send Nie to court, Liu has undergone numerous difficulties set by Nie's group and corrupted government officials. He is even isolated by his own family and friends. In spite of this, being a responsible sergeant and a righteous man, Liu finally conquers all the obstacles and gains enough evidence submitted to the central government to file charges against Nie.

In China, dramas with propagandistic themes are called "main melody dramas," a genre encouraged by the state in recent years (Ying, 2005). "Anti-corruption" theme in dramas is one of the most popular "main melodies." In many cases, these dramas encounter difficulties in not gaining popularity among the audience. However, "Black Hole" has been a hit among TV audience. According to the respondents, one of the major reasons of its success is that it is more realistic than other main melody dramas in showing the dark side of the government. Instead of depicting just "a handful"¹ of corrupted officials, it portrays a network of corruption in the government and shows the techniques employed by the evil force. "This is just what happens in real cases, in the network of corruption. Being realistic is important. These dramas would not arouse audience's attention if they are too fictional." (Guo,

¹² "Black Hole" (Hei Dong) is a 30-episode series produced by Jinyingma Movie& TV Culture Co., Ltd. in 2002.

The Revisionist historical dramas like “Kang Xi Dynasty”(Kang Xi Wang Chao) and “Yong Zheng Dynasty” (Yong Zheng Wang Chao) were also touched upon in the group discussion. Instead of offering new thoughts from history in a metaphorical way, they broached sensitive subjects in contemporary society, such as corruption and power struggles in the government (Ying 2005). However, respondents are aware that the old propaganda purpose continues in these dramas, all aimed at disseminating dominant ideology like totalitarianism and worshipping of “Great Leaders,” as embodied by the emperors.

Case2. Opinions on “Drawing Swords”¹³ Series:

For dramas in the historical category, respondents placed emphasis on the extent to which these dramas challenged the old thoughts and ideas. Most respondents agreed that “Drawing Swords” (Liang Jian) is an excellent example of this kind. The story is centered on a military hero Li Yun-long in the Sino-Japanese War. As a colonel of the Red Army during the war, Li was a genius military leader and often created his unique battle strategies, which proved to be effective in annihilating the enemies. The drama is based on his personal history to reflect major events in the nation and party’s history, including the war between the US and North Korea, the nationwide starvation in the 1960s, and the Cultural Revolution. Li’s personal credo is “To draw out your sword despite that there is no hope to win. Even when you fall down, your body would turn into a mountain.” Guided by this, he could never stay silent and watch the tragedies happening in the society.

Contrary to the perfect images of war hero in previous dramas and movies, Li Yun-long is not a stereotype hero but a bandit-like character of vulgar appearance. He is masculine and individualistic, a born warrior who lives only for the battlefield. This character has broken the myth of PLA, or the Red Army, as civilized and devoted to communist ideals from the very beginning. “He looks like a bandit, and acts like a bandit, which makes him more believable than the handsome and perfect heroes from dramas in the past. Everyone knows that the Red Army rose out of rural areas. This is what they should look like.” (Wu, Interview No.30)

On the other hand, Li’s talent in military tactics and his humanistic views on society are depicted in comparison with his dogmatic superiors in the army. He often shows respect to neither his superior nor the principles and disciplines of PLA. This breaks another myth that has long been on screen that leaders in PLA are always wise and correct, and the disciplines are unshakable. Moreover, the attitudes he took at the time of Anti-right Movement and Cultural Revolution function as implicit criticism to some problems imbedded in the CCP system.

¹³ “Drawing Sword” (Liang Jian) is a thirty-episode series co-produced by Hai Run Media Production Co., Ltd, Shanghai Film Group Corporation and the Culture & Art Center in the Political Department of Sheyang Military Area Command in 2005.

It has been largely agreed that recently, producers of dramas in China are becoming more open towards new thoughts in the society. The censorship on television programs had also been loosened. However, there are still many structural constraints. These audiences are aware that free discussion is only open to sanctioned topics in media. Lots of issues and topics are regarded as forbidden. Even for the topic of Cultural Revolution, discussions are far from free, let alone topics like the "June 4th". "Nobody would risk their career to touch on forbidden topics. There have to be changes on ideas within the Party first. And then you can follow. After all, you know, it's in China." (Guo, Interview No.27)

For the teenagers participating in the research, Mainland dramas were considered rather important among a variety of dramas they watched. Unlike the native youth, the native teenage respondents would constantly watch Mainland dramas. Contrary to the "poor in quality" and "banality" comments on Mainland dramas made by native youth respondents, native teenage respondents considered them as remarkable in both quality and diversity. In fact, comments given on certain genres in Hong Kong and Mainland dramas have almost been reversed from respondents in native youth to those in native teenagers. For instance, Mainland dramas are now native teenage respondents' first choice in the category of historical drama. "The scenes in Mainland dramas are always splendid. The dress and props are almost spotless. Maybe in Hong Kong, people cannot spend too much money on these, which made the dramas less refined." (Lu, Interview No.36) "In my view, the acting in Mainland historical dramas is much better. It is more spontaneous. Compared with that, Hong Kong actors

usually make me feel that they are overdoing their roles a little bit.” (Xie, Interview No.35)

Besides, although dramas in Cantonese language did arouse their sense of familiarity, none of these native respondents considered language as a barrier to their consumption of Mainland and Taiwan dramas. “There are more and more immigrants in the city nowadays, we speak Mandarin most of the time everyday. Mandarin words constantly appear even in our conversations in Cantonese.” (Xie, Interview No.35) “I am OK with even some popular dialects like Shaanxi-hua, Shandong-hua, as I listen to them in many programs, like the Spring Festival Gala. Lately, there is a famous Mainland sitcom called *My Own Swordsman* (Wu Lin Wai Zhuan) . The characters are speaking four or five different dialects. And I like it so much that I’ve watched it twice.” (Lu, Interview No.36)

2) Views on Hong Kong Dramas

It is clear enough that Hong Kong dramas have played a significant role in the lives of Guangzhou young audiences who are about 20 to 25 years old. According to the respondents, most of these dramas have riveting plots, succinct and fluent editing techniques, and romantic scenes. They all highly valued the visual finesse and skillful acting in these dramas in comparison to those in Mainland dramas. Due to their rich viewing experience, the youth audience usually get so familiar with characteristics of genres and the actors’ acting styles that they can, according to individual taste, choose which dramas to watch by the starring actors in the dramas. Especially for the natives,

life portrayed in these dramas always aroused their sense of familiarity.

Most middle-aged respondents also watch a great deal of Hong Kong dramas till now. However, they only would like to talk about dramas in the past, like “The Bund” (Shanghai Tan), “Cold Blood, Warm Heart” (Tian Di Nan Er), and “The Greed of Man” (Da Shi Dai). They watched Hong Kong dramas regularly for two main reasons. For one thing, they are more entertaining than Mainland ones. Most of the time, there is no need to do a lot of thinking while watching them, thus they can really relax themselves. For another, dramas on TVB JADE or ATV HOME are aired on a regular basis. These dramas were considered as the expedient choice at the time when the respondents had no preference as to what to watch, or at the time when they had to wait for a while to see other programs.

Middle-aged respondents agreed that their sense of familiarity could be aroused by Hong Kong dramas, mostly because of shared language and Cantonese cultural specifics. In spite of that, cultural proximity does not seem like an important factor in affecting their choices to watch Hong Kong dramas, especially since they find these dramas as having too little relevance to their life. “We have similar culture. But that’s not like we are leading the same life. Those stories happened in another place. They have nothing to do with my own life.” (Jiang, Interview No.28) In contrast, they found the lifestyles and social issues presented in Mainland drama, as discussed in the above paragraphs, as more relevant to their daily lives.

In addition, most of them ascribed the central reason why they watched many Hong Kong dramas in the past to the fact that Mainland TV industry was once left behind.

Four out of six people admitted that they have been watching more Mainland Dramas in recent years, as there have been more options. Compared with some Mainland dramas, Hong Kong ones were regarded as too commercialized and with little depth. Also, they looked on this difference more as different functions carried out by different kinds of drama rather than disparity in quality.

Guo (Interview No.31): It is not because the Hong Kong producers are not capable enough. It is just how they position themselves in the audience market. They want to make relaxing, funny programs that appeal to a wide range of audience, including kids and poorly educated people.

Compared to the middle-aged and youth respondents, people from the teenage group have less experience with Hong Kong drama. Many of the non-natives were even reluctant to give comments to Hong Kong dramas. For some native teenage audiences, a phenomenon regarding Hong Kong drama is that re-runs of dramas produced in the past might be more attractive than first-runs nowadays. A 16-year-old boy who also made Hong Kong drama as his first choice mentioned that he actually did not spend much time on TVB JADE, as re-runs were always aired by Mainland channels (Huang, Interview No.34).

Given the changes on these viewing habits, the native respondents still agreed that Hong Kong dramas have excellent acting, riveting plots, and high storytelling techniques, similar to what had been pointed out by the youth respondents. However, at the same time, they regard all dramas of different origins to have unique strong points. "In fact there is only one criterion based on which I choose dramas, the quality. The source is not really something I would care about. Although I watch Hong Kong dramas the most, I would say the best idol drama series are coming from Korea and

Taiwan, like *Meteor Garden* (Liu Xing Hua Yuan) and “The Outsiders” (Dou Yu).”

(Huang, Interview No.34)

Perception of Hong Kong from dramas

As pointed out earlier, influence from media constitutes part of the context in which generations evolve. At the same time, it interacts with other factors within the context of both social and individual levels. In terms of media influence received, the youth respondents at the age of 20-25 differ significantly from other groups. The early trans-border television dramas from Hong Kong accompanied the larger part of their lives. In comparison, middle-aged respondents have a longer history of watching Mainland dramas than Hong Kong dramas, while teenage respondents have a viewing history of multi-source dramas.

However, difference in collective experience and memory is not identical to divergence in ideas and opinions, which can only be observed in factual evidence. How Hong Kong dramas affected the youth respondents' lives has been explicated in detail in Chapter 5. The modern image of Hong Kong was so strong in their mind that they either considered it as a model to learn from or thought of it as an imagined future of Guangzhou. In the following paragraphs the perceptions of Hong Kong in relations to Guangzhou by other groups are also presented.

In most audience research, audience first has to regard the trans-border dramas as realistic before talking about their perception of other places from these dramas (Gripsrud, 1995; Ko, 2004). In other words, these audiences have no actual

experience but only mediated experience with the other country. In most cases, this mediated experience differs considerably from the actual one, and actual experiences with the other place would function to shatter illusions created by imported television programs. However, sometimes the opposite becomes true.

In this research, all respondents at the age of 20-25 considered Hong Kong dramas as highly realistic even though these dramas were surely not their only access to learn about Hong Kong. As pointed out earlier, most native Guangzhou people have relatives in Hong Kong. Among the native respondents in this research, only two had no relatives or friends in Hong Kong. These relatives and friends from Hong Kong, far from shattering their “illusions”, helped to reinforce the modern image of Hong Kong in their mind by bringing them high-quality and exotic commodities from Hong Kong at the time when life in Guangzhou was still simple and poor. The modern image of Hong Kong was so strong and popular that even the non-natives were profoundly influenced.

In contrast, middle-aged respondents do not care about whether Hong Kong dramas are realistic or not. According to their account, with their rich life experience, they cannot count dramas as reliable sources of knowledge about society. Nevertheless, they tend to verify the authenticity of television content against their experience. Thus, they classify Hong Kong dramas as pure entertainment and they do not believe in them.

Zhong (Interview No.29): Hong Kong dramas are always exaggerating luxurious lives or making up stories about vicious office politics. Only kids are going to believe them. We have experienced all these things. There are similar issues, perhaps, but not as scary at all.

Guo (Interview No.31): I have been to Hong Kong numerous times. Several years ago, I worked there for six months. I know about the real Hong Kong, not from some commercial popular drama series. For instance, you may watch a great deal of legends of business in those dramas. But it is not a place where everyone can succeed overnight. I see many people constrained by their class and stayed with the same job for decades.”

At the same time, it is necessary to notice that, these ideas as well as judgments are not only based on their personal experiences but also subject to the influence from mainstream discourses and other social-shaping factors. With strong memories of the long-term antagonism between communism and capitalism, they seemed to be preoccupied by social systems and ideological issues. For one thing, these respondents have always conceptualized the modernized Hong Kong with its capitalist system. They are not so enthusiastic about the ideas of “learning from Hong Kong” or “Hong Kong as our modernized future” the youth respondents, for the reason that they look at Hong Kong and Guangzhou as absolutely different societies. “Our society is developing in a different route determined by our social system. I don’t think there is much to learn from Hong Kong in either political or economic aspect.” (Huang, Interview No.32) For another, even in terms of economy, Mainland and Hong Kong are not comparable to each other in their views. “The two places rely on different types of industry. Hong Kong has always been and will continue to be a financial center. Our advantage is in our well-balanced industrial systems. After all, we are in a much bigger country.” (Guo, Interview No.27)

For the teenagers, the modern image of Hong Kong has been largely transformed today. In terms of both historical and media context, the middle-aged respondents and youth respondents have overlapping memories of the 1980s and 1990s, whereas

teenage audiences are only familiar with the world in the past decade. For these teenagers born after 1990, Hong Kong's heyday before the financial crisis can only be imagined from the re-run drama series. Even the Handover of Hong Kong is already becoming blurred in their memories. Within the distinct social context they are in, their perception of media texts differs in many ways from their elders'.

Similar to respondents in the youth group, a few of them have been to Hong Kong, thus they gained most of their knowledge about Hong Kong from drama series. However, as pointed out in previous paragraphs, these teenagers are hardly concerned about the modern image of Hong Kong while watching dramas, let alone its relation with Guangzhou. According to these people, Hong Kong is without doubt a modernized place, but just as much as other places. In terms of modern lifestyle, they viewed the difference not in the places where they lived, but in the groups or communities to which they belonged. The idea of "middle class" has already been in their minds before they watched it in Hong Kong dramas.

Ouyang (Interview No.33): The 'modernized' lifestyles you can see in Hong Kong dramas are no more than the white-collar workers' working inside office buildings, hanging out in bars and pubs, and living in big apartments. These are not something you cannot find in Guangzhou. There are white collars in Guangzhou. It is just not that kind of life led by people like me."

It is also in this sense that they regarded Guangzhou and Hong Kong as "quite similar already."

Perception of Hong Kong in relation to China

The image of Hong Kong for Guangzhou young audience is modernized yet at the same time, rather similar to that of Guangzhou. In this way, Hong Kong dramas have

set up the perfect role model for Guangzhou and for themselves. On one hand, the modern lifestyles portrayed in these dramas displayed the sharp difference between these two cities in front of them. On the other, Cantonese cultural elements constantly appeared in these dramas, which gave them the idea that these two cities only differed in the stages of development but were in fact similar on a deeper level. Even the colonized and westernized history of Hong Kong was not considered crucial to this difference. They were really eager to learn from the modern experience of Hong Kong in order to improve life in Guangzhou.

However, respondents in their middle-aged comprehended the image of Hong Kong in another way. They saw Hong Kong still as an independent region from the Mainland. Everyone in this group initiatively brought up Hong Kong's history as a colony and as belonging to another country. It is clear that this colonized past has marked a virtual border between the two places in their minds.

Guo (Interview No.31): Actually the name of 'special administrative region' is just another way to keep all its deeply rooted colonial traditions and its position as a special place outside the border. You see Shenzhen also in the same name. But only Hong Kong is a real 'special region', an independent place from the Mainland.

With Hong Kong's uniqueness and independence in mind, unlike the young adults, they regarded the relationship between Hong Kong and Guangzhou, or all other Mainland cities, as always in competition that is hardly different from the competitions between China and other countries. Nobody agreed that the assistance provided to Hong Kong by Mainland China after the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, such as CEPA and the "solo-tourism", would result in any impairment of either its independent position or its strength in competition.

Jiang (Interview No.28): It is like when somebody falls down while running, we give him a hand. But he has to finally get up on his own. And after that, he may run even faster than before. Hong Kong has got a lot of experience in its previous development and a solid financial foundation. I think it will be back in the lead very soon.”

Teenage respondents had another picture of Hong Kong that is distinct from those of the other groups. In this group, everyone perceived Hong Kong as only a city in China, a developed, prosperous yet not necessarily unique city within the national border. Unlike their elders who saw Hong Kong in an independent position, they insisted that Hong Kong belongs to China. The fact that it is more developed does not lead to its independence. They all learned about Hong Kong’s history in class, but few had clear idea about the significance of the colonized history of this city. “I know it used to be a colony, and it is still a capitalist society. Also, I know that capitalism is different from our socialism, but I’m not sure about how they are so different. ” (Liu, Interview No.42)

Restricted partly by their age and life experience, they could only tell the difference in two aspects. First, Hong Kong people are more civilized and polite. “As seen from the dramas, they always use polite words in the workplace. Even when people make a serious mistake, others will not yell at them or cause shame on them.” (Gan, Interview No.37) Second, Hong Kong is a wealthy place and a shopping center for tourism. “The first thing I can think about Hong Kong is shopping. There are advertisements everywhere that ask you to shop in Hong Kong. But the prices there are shocking! Everything costs like thousands of dollars!” (Ouyang, Interview No.33)

Conclusion

This chapter presents data and analysis regarding the same issues from two other age

groups to compare with those from the “Trans-border TV Generation” group. In terms of viewing preferences, Hong Kong drama is a favorable choice for most respondents from different groups. It has a noticeably higher viewer share among native respondents in different age groups. However, this high viewer-ship is not absolutely identical to the importance of Hong Kong drama in their lives. For the middle-aged respondents, Hong Kong dramas are more important than Mainland dramas for entertainment in their daily lives, yet are not comparable to them in terms of social significance. For the youth respondents, Hong Kong dramas are not only their favorite programs but they also serve as lifestyle references. In this sense, they are beyond compare with dramas of other origins. In the case of the teenage respondents, Hong Kong dramas are only one of a variety of choices that can meet their needs in recreation as well as knowledge of life.

As stated in the previous chapters, respondents in the youth group tend to identify more with Hong Kong culture through TV viewing. This cultural influence is weakened on teenagers as they have more choices nowadays. There is hardly any cultural influence on middle-aged respondents as they regard Hong Kong dramas as nothing more than entertainment.

If we consider changes on these respondents’ identification with their actual viewing frequency, it can be obvious that higher media consumption does not necessarily bring more change to audience’s cultural identification. This observation is largely in line with Stuart Hall’s notions of different types of readings on media texts. Given the diversity of audience, it would be a problem to argue that there are absolute preferred

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Discussions

This study examines the consumption of Hong Kong dramas by Guangzhou youth in the past decades. The focus is placed on how the factor of cultural proximity affects this process and their perception of Hong Kong. Previous chapters have delineated the young audiences' viewing patterns, pleasures, media use and perception regarding trans-border Hong Kong television dramas and put them in a cross-generational context. In this chapter, research findings are summarized in order to recapitulate the main arguments in the study. Moreover, its theoretical contribution and limitations are also presented.

Summary

The analytical framework of this research is formulated from the attempt to integrate four theoretical perspectives during the research on television audience: the social impact of trans-border television in the age of globalization, audience consumption of trans-border television, the interaction between media and youth culture and the formation of generational culture under the influence of mass media. The research findings are divided into three chapters.

Chapter 4 provides detailed description and discussion of these young audiences' viewing preferences, pleasures, and media uses. As natives and non-natives differ in their sense of cultural proximity with Hong Kong, the comparison between them illustrates how the factor of cultural proximity affects media consumption activities. Grown up in a time when Hong Kong dramas were among the best programs on

television, both the natives and non-natives were deeply influenced by these programs.

Through daily viewing, Guangzhou audiences have made Hong Kong dramas and Hong Kong popular culture an indispensable part of their own culture. Research findings show that although cultural proximity plays an important role in these audiences' preference of Hong Kong dramas, it is in no way the only factor to consider. On the individual level, television consumption patterns are subject to personal constraints such as family characteristics (native and non-native families). Meanwhile, the specific media context in the 1980s and 1990s, based on these respondents' memory, illustrates that Hong Kong drama's success in the cross-border market and its social influence were largely due to its high production quality. Moreover, in the structural aspect, tacit permission given by local government to Hong Kong channels in the early 1990s was a determinant factor of its access to local market in the first place.

In Chapter 5, we see that the long-term consumption of Hong Kong dramas during their growth did result in high identification with Hong Kong culture among youth respondents, both natives and non-natives. Their feeling of a mixed culture and associating the image of Hong Kong with Guangzhou's future demonstrated the prevalence of Hong Kong popular culture in this generation. In terms of media context, information about the modernized Hong Kong contained in its drama series, rather than other elements, served to be the major reason of the change in these young people's cultural identification. At the same time, the society being in a transition

state, when capitalist economy was in fact welcomed into China, functioned as the larger context of these audiences' transformation within. Information about capitalist modernity conveyed by these dramas echoed with the transformation of conceptual framework among these youth and eventually resulted in a brand new framework.

At the same time, difference in sense of cultural proximity creates discrepancies in the perception of Hong Kong and its modern culture between natives and non-natives. For individual audience members in different groups, backgrounds and previous experience considerably affected their identification styles. Natives with strong sense of belonging to their local culture are unlikely to totally identify with a Hong Kong one, while non-natives seem to possess more mobile cultural identities and tend to identify more with a more modernized culture.

Chapter 6 displays the results from two other age groups regarding the same issues. Through comparing the interaction between their life experience and their consumption of Hong Kong dramas with data from the youth, I try to introduce social context into the analysis. The middle-aged respondents at the age of 35-45 had much more experience with communist ideology than the other respondents due to the ten-year Cultural Revolution in their childhood and adolescence. With accumulated experience, or rather, preoccupied mindsets from their past, their perception of Hong Kong was not at all determined by the content of Hong Kong dramas despite their rich viewing experience. On the other hand, youth respondents grew up in the age of "Reform and Open-up" and could watch Hong Kong television programs since their childhood. They are truly the "Hong Kong TV Generation" with both high

consumption of these dramas and high cultural identification. For people in the younger group with the age of 14-16, China seemed to be developing in a marketized economy ever since and Hong Kong was already sufficiently integrated into China. According to them, the role model position of Hong Kong has been weakened by Hong Kong's new position in their minds as only a developed and affluent neighbor city to Guangzhou.

As indicated by this case, besides the factor of cultural proximity, the extent to which trans-border media affect cultural identification of local audience depends considerably on opportunities and conditions. Information conveyed by trans-border media is better received at the time when the local society is longing for a higher modernity and the local government also welcomes these media. During the transformation of Chinese society, there are some Guangzhou youth who were looking for role models for the future of their society when they encountered Hong Kong media. These programs and the information they carried soon entered these audiences' minds without being much hindered by cultural and political barriers.

The case of Guangzhou young audience also shows that cultural proximity is a much more complicated factor than merely audience preference in watching television programs (Straubhaar, 1991). It enables the natives to internalize large amounts of Hong Kong cultural information. In this way, it facilitates local identification with the regional cultural center across border and makes media products from Hong Kong a threat to local or national cultural unity. In this sense, cultural proximity is not necessarily associated with audience's resistance to foreign media, as is assumed by

many researchers.

Besides, to have a sense of cultural proximity requires certain sense of cultural attachment and belonging in the first place. These two factors both vary in different audience groups. For non-natives, this sense of belonging to their hometown holds them back from total identification with Hong Kong culture. But for non-natives, there is little problem in the sense of belonging that will stand in their way towards identification with a more modern culture. Indicated by this case, audience's unique background and previous experience may either facilitate or obstruct media's influence on identification.

Implications and Limitations

As discussed in Chapter 2, in the past decades, a number of audience research scholars have made significant progresses with their grounded researches on how audience actually perceived and made use of trans-border television programs. These findings serve as powerful evidence to dispel the early over-simplified idea that advanced trans-border media are all-powerful and that they jeopardize the diversity of indigenous culture. These previous audience researches focused mostly on two issues regarding the "active audience." Firstly, audiences employ different readings on these foreign media texts according to their background such as ethnicity and class. Second, cultural proximity among local audience works against foreign media products. With the directions given by previous scholars, the activeness of audience in different communities or under different circumstances can be examined with deliberation.

Besides those explored in these researches, many other factors, which also affect media consumption process, need to be discovered and analyzed.

This study on a whole provides rich descriptive data of audiences' specific experiences in consuming cross-border television dramas in the case of Guangzhou audiences and Hong Kong dramas. Unlike previous researches, which were mostly centered on particular media texts in a certain period of time, this study aimed to investigate the Guangzhou audiences' accumulated experiences with numerous Hong Kong dramas for more than a decade. From these data, it tries to explore how meanings are produced from the interaction between cross-border media consumption and social context. Their long-term consumption experiences with trans-border television dramas make them unique objects of audience research in a media globalization context.

Moreover, built on Straubhaar's (1991) idea of cultural proximity's impact on audience's viewing preferences, this study takes a further step to extend the research on this factor to audience's reading and perception of media texts. Guangzhou young audiences' long-term trans-border media consumption allows for a close look into how cultural proximity affects not only trans-border media consumption activities, but also audiences' identification patterns. This is the major contribution of this study to audience research in a globalization context. In this way, this study may generate insight into other studies on trans-border television flow between two regions with cultural proximity.

Based on these findings, the research brings the discussion on young audiences'

media experiences in a cross-generational context. By doing this, I tried to introduce the specific social context of trans-border media consumption into current audience research. Other than government policies and the competition of local media (Chadha & Kavoori, 2000), the processes of social development and transformation are in fact significant contextual factors that need to be considered in audience research.

These findings, albeit from a unique Asian case, may shed light on audience researches in other places. For one thing, studies from a historical or generational perspective may provide more insight into the mechanism of audience consumption. It helps to understand the interaction between media and social context, as well as its transformation. For another, in terms of media influence they received, differences in their sense of cultural proximity with media texts between native and non-native audiences may not be exclusive to Guangzhou or China. With the increasing mobility of population and workforce on the global scale, the issue of cultural identification has set many new challenges in front of social science researchers.

As suggested in most audience research cases from Western countries, audiences' social backgrounds, class and education in particular, function as an important factor in their perception of dramas. During the interviews, respondents' profiles (including family background, family income, education, etc.) were carefully recorded and analyzed with data of their accounts. However, except for the difference between natives and non-natives, impacts of background factors are not as evident in the case of the Guangzhou audience.

There are many possible explanations to this issue. For one thing, great changes have

taken place in China regarding class structure or “strata” with the transformation of society. As a former communist country, the old strata have declined since the introduction of market economy (Wang, 2005; Li, 2001). A new “middle stratum”, referring to people such as the white-collar workers, just like the middle class in Western societies, is on the rise. The criteria to be used to categorize class or strata in China are still under debate, since Western indicators like income, education, occupation, etc. do not seem to correspond with collective consciousness in current China (Wang, 2004; Fan & Peng, 2005). These phenomena suggest that the class structure in China is still too unstable to be used as a credible factor in qualitative research.

There are also several limitations of the study that need to be acknowledged. First, taking a qualitative approach with in-depth interview as its major research method, this study has an inherent limitation with respect to the representativeness of its respondents and data. Second, due to the possibility of unrepresentative results to generalize specific findings from the research to other places without noticing the contextual constraints would be a problem. Besides, respondents’ intentional avoidance of certain topics during the interviews, such as the June 4th incident, had likewise created problems for analyzing significant events of social imprinting in their collective memory.

Appendixes

Appendix I: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (Translated from Chinese)

1. Preferences in TV Viewing and Comments to Dramas from Different Sources:

- 1) Do you spend as much time as you did five or ten years ago on watching television? If no, in which period of your life have you spent the largest amount of time on watching television? Why?
- 2) In average, how many hours do you spend on watching television on a daily basis? How many hours do you spend on watching dramas?
- 3) Do you watch drama alone or with other people? Who are they? Who have control on which channels to watch?
- 4) Please rank the sources of drama according to your viewing priority and explain your reasons.
 - A. Mainland drama
 - B. Hong Kong drama
 - C. Taiwan drama
 - D. Korea drama
 - E. Japan drama
 - F. America drama
- 5) Is your actual TV viewing experience exactly in accordance with your preferences? If no, please rank the sources according to your actual amount of TV viewing.
- 6) Please comment on your top three choices in terms of their strengths and weaknesses.
- 7) From your favorite three dramas sources respectively, do you recall the first drama series that you really enjoyed?
- 8) Please rank the importance of these elements in affecting your decisions on what to watch. Explain how you define these concepts with examples.
 - A. Production Quality
 - B. Entertainment

-
- C. Creativity
 - D. Reality
 - E. Plot
 - F. Actor
 - G. Life or Social Information
 - I. Knowledge

9) Do you have a favorite genre in drama? What is it and why do you like it the most?

10) Please give out several examples on actors or characters that impressed you.

2. Viewing Pleasures and Media Uses:

- 1) When you watch dramas, what elements draw your attention the most? Have you ever pay attention to particular things? (e.g. fashion, environment, lifestyle, etc.)
- 2) Have you ever tried to learn things from television in the past? What are these things?
- 3) Do you think watching television can affect people's lives? Could you give examples in people in your life?
- 4) Do you consider watching imported TV dramas an important way to learn about other places? If yes, please give me some examples of things that you learn from dramas.
- 5) Generally speaking, how would you describe the functions of watching TV dramas?

3. Interpretation of Hong Kong:

- 1) Aside from watching Hong Kong dramas, how do you learn about Hong Kong? Do these experiences contradict with those from watching Hong Kong dramas and how?
- 2) In what aspects do you have comments on Hong Kong?
- 3) How do you think of Hong Kong people and life in Hong Kong?
- 4) How do you think of Hong Kong society and politics?
- 5) Compared with Mainland, Taiwan, Korea, Japan and America, what are Hong Kong's strengths and weaknesses in terms of being a place for living?
- 6) How would you describe the importance of Hong Kong popular culture for your generation?
- 7) Will you ever consider migration to Hong Kong? Explain your reasons. If the answer is no,

will you consider working in Hong Kong? Explain your reasons.

8) Is Guangzhou becoming more and more like Hong Kong? If yes, in which aspects are they becoming alike?

4. Uses of Other Media:

- 1) Do you spend more time on using other media than on watching TV? What are they?
- 2) Is watching TV drama important to your daily life? If yes, why do you think they are important?

Appendix II: PROFILE OF RESEARCH RESPONDENTS

(Abbreviation: M: Male; F: Female)

Interview No.	Surname	Sex	Age	Native/Non-native	Status	Monthly Family Income
1	Chen	F	22	NATIVE	College Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
2	Lu	F	20	NATIVE	College Student	Less than RMB 1,000
3	Ye	F	22	NATIVE	College Student	RMB3, 000-5,000
4	Huang	F	25	NATIVE	HR Assistant	RMB3, 000-5,000
5	Wang	F	20	NATIVE	Secondary School Graduate	RMB 1,000-3,000
6	Liu	F	24	NATIVE	Graduate Student	RMB3, 000-5,000
7	Fan	F	25	NATIVE	Graduate Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
8	Wang	F	21	NATIVE	Junior College Student	RMB 1,000-3,000
9	Li	F	24	NATIVE	PR Officer	More than RMB 10,000
10	Ye	F	23	NATIVE	College Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
11	Li	M	25	NATIVE	Sales Representative	More than RMB 10,000
12	Luo	M	20	NATIVE	Junior College Student	RMB 1,000-3,000
13	Nie	M	21	NATIVE	Junior College Student	RMB3, 000-5,000
14	Jiang	M	20	NATIVE	College Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
15	Wang	M	22	NATIVE	Art Editor	RMB 1,000-3,000
16	Yao	F	24	NATIVE	Graduate Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
17	Zhang	M	24	NATIVE	Marketing Representative	RMB 5,000-10,000
18	Qian	F	23	NON-NATIVE	Graduate Student	RMB3, 000-5,000
19	Yang	F	24	NON-NATIVE	Accountant	RMB 5,000-10,000
20	Xu	M	24	NON-NATIVE	Graduate Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
21	Wang	F	23	NON-NATIVE	Government Official	RMB3, 000-5,000
22	Zhu	F	24	NON-NATIVE	Sales Representative	More than RMB 10,000
23	Nie	F	23	NON-NATIVE	Secretary	RMB 5,000-10,000

24	Wei	F	25	NON-NATIVE	Graduate Student	More than RMB 10,000
25	Zhang	F	23	NON-NATIVE	Market Analyst	More than RMB 10,000
26	Xu	M	24	NON-NATIVE	Government Official	More than RMB 10,000
27	Guo	M	45	NATIVE	Deputy General Manager	RMB 5,000-10,000
28	Jiang	M	37	NATIVE	Driver	RMB3, 000-5,000
29	Zhong	M	45	NATIVE	Salesman	RMB3, 000-5,000
30	Wu	M	44	NATIVE	Government Official	RMB 5,000-10,000
31	Guo	F	45	NATIVE	Finance Manager	More than RMB 10,000
32	Huang	F	39	NATIVE	HR Manager	RMB 5,000-10,000
33	Ouyang	F	15	NATIVE	Middle School Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
34	Huang	M	16	NATIVE	Middle School Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
35	Xie	F	16	NATIVE	Middle School Student	RMB3, 000-5,000
36	Lu	F	15	NATIVE	Middle School Student	More than RMB 10,000
37	Gan	F	14	NATIVE	Middle School Student	RMB3, 000-5,000
38	Cui	F	16	NON-NATIVE	Middle School Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
39	Xu	F	15	NON-NATIVE	Middle School Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
40	Yao	F	16	NON-NATIVE	Middle School Student	RMB 5,000-10,000
41	Li	F	16	NON-NATIVE	Middle School Student	RMB3, 000-5,000
42	Liu	M	14	NON-NATIVE	Middle School Student	RMB3, 000-5,000

Appendix III: VIEWING PROFILES OF RESEARCH RESPONDENTS

Interview No.	Surname	Approximate TV Viewing Hours (per day)	Watch Most Source (Drama)	Favorite Source	Top 3 Viewing Priorities out of 6 Sources
1	Chen	3	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1. Hong Kong 2.America 3. Korea
2	Lu	2	Hong Kong	America	1. America 2. Hong Kong 3. Mainland
3	Ye	3	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1. Hong Kong 2. America 3. Taiwan
4	Huang	1-2	Hong Kong	America	1. America 2.Hong Kong 3. Mainland
5	Wang	3	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1.Hong Kong 2.Japan 3. Korea
6	Liu	1	Hong Kong	Japan	1.Hong Kong 2.Japan 3.America
7	Fan	2	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1.Hong Kong 2.Japan 3.America
8	Wang	3	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1.Hong Kong 2. Japan 3.Korea
9	Li	2	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1.Hong Kong 2.America 3.Japan
10	Ye	2	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1. Hong Kong 2..Mainland 3..Japan
11	Li	2	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1.Hong Kong 2. Japan 3.Korea
12	Luo	4	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1.Hong Kong 2.America 3.Mainland
13	Nie	2	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1.Hong Kong 2. Japan 3.Korea
14	Jiang	2	Hong Kong	Japan	1. Japan 2. Hong Kong 3. Mainland
15	Wang	2	Hong Kong	Japan	1..Japan 2.Hong Kong 3..Mainland
16	Yao	1	Taiwan	Taiwan	1.Taiwan 2.Hong Kong 3.Korea
17	Zhang	2	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1.Hong Kong 2. Japan 3.Korea
18	Qian	2	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1. Hong Kong 2..Mainland 3.Korea
19	Yang	1	America	America	1. America 2.Korea 3.Taiwan
20	Xu	2	Mainland	Hong Kong	1.Hong Kong 2.Mainland 3..Japan
21	Wang	1	Hong Kong	Japan	1..Japan 2.Hong Kong 3.Korea
22	Zhu	3	America	Hong Kong	1. America 2.Hong Kong 3. Korea

23	Nie	2	Mainland	Mainland	1. Mainland 2. Taiwan 3. Hong Kong
24	Wei	3	America	Hong Kong	1. America 2. Hong Kong 3. Taiwan
25	Zhang	1	America	America	1. America 2. Mainland 3. Hong Kong
26	Xu	1	Mainland	Mainland	1. Mainland 2. America 3. Hong Kong
27	Guo	5	Mainland	Mainland	1. Mainland 2. Hong Kong 3. Taiwan
28	Jiang	4	Mainland	Mainland	1. Mainland 2. Hong Kong 3. Taiwan
29	Zhong	3	Mainland	Mainland	1. Mainland 2. Hong Kong
30	Wu	4	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1. Hong Kong 2. Mainland 3. America
31	Guo	5	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1. Hong Kong 2. Mainland
32	Huang	4	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1. Hong Kong 2. Korea 3. Mainland
33	Ouyang	1	Hong Kong	Korea	1. Korea 2. Hong Kong 3. Taiwan
34	Huang	2	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1. Hong Kong 2. Mainland 3. America
35	Xie	1	Hong Kong	Mainland	1. Mainland 2. Hong Kong 3. Korea
36	Lu	1	Hong Kong	Korea	1. Korea 2. Hong Kong 3. Mainland
37	Gan	1	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	1. Hong Kong 2. Korea 3. Mainland
38	Cui	2	Mainland	Korea	1. Korea 2. America 3. Mainland
39	Xu	2	Mainland	America	1. America 2. Mainland 3. Korea
40	Yao	2	Mainland	Mainland	1. Mainland 2. America 3. Korea
41	Li	1	Korea	Korea	1. Korea 2. Mainland 3. America
42	Liu	1	Mainland	Mainland	1. Mainland 2. America 3. Hong Kong

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